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The Reporter-Detective's Big Pull.

BY WILLIAM PERRY BROWN.



"I AM THE NEPHEW OF COMMODORE SUTHERLAND, WHOSE BODY LIES ON THE FLOOR."

The Reporter-Detective's Big Pull;
OR, THE
WALL STREET SWELL'S SNAG.

BY WM. PERRY BROWN.
AUTHOR OF "BROOKLYN BOB'S BULGE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

"YOUR CHANCE HAS COME, MY BOY." The telephone in the editorial rooms is ringing.

"B-r-r-r-r-r-r!" it keeps going, until the night editor jumps to the machine and places the tube at his ear as he calls back:

"Well?"

As he listens his face lights up.

As he hangs up the receiver he glances at the clock, and turns to a smooth-faced, boyish young fellow, who is at one of the writing tables in the next room.

"Boland," calls the night editor through the open doorway between the rooms.

Boland came forward at once, tucking his note-book in his breast pocket.

"I am going to give you a chance, Boland, or rather your chance has come, my boy, without my aid. I have no one to send but you—see?"

"I see."

"Should you make a good thing for the paper out of this, it may lead to a good thing for you. Do you take me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, I want you to go at once to No. — Fifth Avenue. Take the Elevated. Ask for Commodore Sutherland."

Boland started. This was the name of one of the financial magnates of the land.

"You understand?" asked the editor, sharply.

"Every word, sir," returned the young reporter.

"Send in your card and ask for the commodore. You must manage to see him, somehow. If you don't, some other paper will, and we may be scooped. He has been dodging the newspaper men all day. I have it from a sure source that he has just gone home. Pump him regarding the squeeze in Union Pacific. I suppose you have kept up with Wall street news, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir. It is said that the commodore has cleared a million or more. His nephew, De Lancy Leland, a Wall street swell, is reported short on the deal to the tune of five hundred thousand more than he will be able to meet. Also that he lays his ruin to Commodore Sutherland."

"I see. You'll do. Well, get an interview out of the old man, if you have to risk a kicking afterward. This paper has got to have one—got to—mind you. It looks to you to get it. Now, off you go!"

Five minutes later Thomas Boland, or Tom, as he was usually called, was sharpening his pencil on board the Elevated Railroad.

"Old Briggs seems to think I am still tied to mamma's apron-strings," he said to himself. "I guess all the fellows do. Well, I hope to show them before long who I am, and what I can do!"

The train rattled on to Fifty-ninth street. Boland ran down the station stairs and hurried away. Meanwhile Mr. Briggs, the night editor, began to feel uncomfortable.

"I wish some of the other boys had been in," he thought. "This Sutherland affair is apt to be a big thing. Don't suppose there is another paper that knows just where the commodore is. Boland is very young, and I fear awfully green. But, hang it, what else could I do?"

He sighed, lighted a cigar, then fell savagely with his blue pencil upon a long report of some rally of the Populists, out in Kansas, that day.

Tom, in the mean time, turned up Fifth avenue, and walking rapidly for a few minutes, arrived in front of the Sutherland mansion. He pulled the bell. No one came to the door. Then he rang again. Still no answer. A third and harder pull met with similar inattention. Then he began to consider what he had best do next.

He leaned over the brown-stone railing and looked in at a window. The gas was evidently turned low in one of the drawing-rooms, for the light within was dim. He could detect the

vague outlines of furniture, and pictures, and rich rugs on the carpeted floor. Under another impulse he rang the bell once more. But it was with the usual result.

"Are they all dead, I wonder?" he ejaculated, impatiently. "Strange there are no servants about."

People were passing along the pavements, carriages were rolling by, and the street-lights shone brilliantly. The silence within the apparently vacant mansion seemed almost uncanny. Again Tom leaned over the balustrade, this time further than before. Suddenly he drew back, while every nerve in him throbbed violently as the blood jumped in his veins. He drew back pale and breathless.

"What the deuce shall I do now?" he thought.

He seized the door-knob, hardly realizing what he was at, when, to his surprise, the door opened at his touch. It had been left ajar by some one! He did not hesitate, but passed quickly through the vestibule into a large hall with doors to the right and a broad stairway winding upward at the other end. In this hall the gas was also turned low.

This was a critical moment for young Boland. Should he proceed further, risking he knew not what danger, and possible misconstruction, or should he return and report his lack of success?

"I must take a look into that drawing-room," he resolved, and allowing himself no time to hesitate he opened the first right-hand door. A kind of shudder seized him, and under an uncontrollable impulse, he darted forward to turn up the gas. His foot struck some soft, heavy object and he reeled into a richly-upholstered chair. Then, nerving himself anew, he sprung up, turned on the gas and cast his eye downward. The curdling thrill that had so nearly overcome him was not without cause.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, falling back a step or two.

CHAPTER II.

TOM'S DISCOVERY—AN ARREST.

At his feet was the body of a man, lying face downward. The back of the head was crushed in, evidently by the blows of some blunt instrument.

At sight of an actual, tangible cause for his dread, fear gave way in Tom's mind to his newspaper instinct. Here was a bigger sensation than old Briggs had dreamed of, and Tom's shrewdness told him that his own chance had come if he managed rightly. A seemingly deserted house—a murder—the body yet warm, for he felt to see, though shuddering again as his hand touched the inanimate flesh.

Boland was first on the ground. He alone, of all the city's alert news-gatherers, knew of this thing! Even the police were in ignorance. He must be at once prompt, cool, sure and circumspect. He thanked his stars now that he had plenty of nerve.

He again bent down and turned the head so that he could see the face. Then he once more started back in surprise. He had seen that countenance before on the Stock Exchange, at the Gold Board, and elsewhere. It was that of a king among men during many a maddening flurry, when millions were at stake upon each revolution of the electric ticker. It was a face well known everywhere in New York.

It was the face of Commodore Sutherland!

The tall, portly figure, the abundant gray hair, the white beard, the strong Roman nose were unmistakable. Tom knew that there could be no mistake of identity. He stood meditatively over the body with his back to the hall door. Had he been thinking less intently, or had his eye been toward the door, he would have become aware of a stealthy opening of another door in the hall, and of a swift, noiseless movement toward the front entrance. A man's form, muffled to the eyes, was stealing by the open front drawing room door. It shot a swift glance at the young reporter, then passed on over the soft hall carpeting, out at the street door, down the steps and then swiftly receded from sight.

Tom, all unconscious, was making up his mind how to proceed. Before giving the alarm he resolved to investigate a little himself, for the benefit of his paper. He examined the dead man's pockets. Money, watch and other contents had not been disturbed. It did not seem that robbery could have been the motive of the crime. In one of the commodore's hands he found a man's scarf pin tightly clutched, together with a portion of a four-in-hand tie. These, after a brief reflection, he concealed upon his own person. Hardly the proper thing to do, perhaps, but as Briggs said, Tom was "green" and he was working to help himself as well as the public and his paper.

He began a hurried search of the floor. The carpet was a heavy moquette of an elaborate pattern. At a spot near the portiere leading to the back drawing-room, was a damp, discolored spot. His hand was upon the carpet instantly.

Blood!

The body seemed to have been moved after the man was stricken down. Why? Obviously so that it could be seen by any person entering the hall. But, what would be the incentive to such an act? Would it not be apt to be the maneuver of one who knew what people were expected and when they would arrive?

One unfamiliar with the house and its occupants would doubtless have allowed the body to lie where it would remain undiscovered as long as possible. Somewhat in this way Tom reasoned.

He now glanced into the hall and saw the commodore's well-known white silk hat hanging on the rack. This he also examined and found that it must have been placed there, after the murder. The rim was spotted a little with blood. One side had been crushed in but had been straightened out again carefully.

Tom turned his attention to the street door. The catch inside was also bloody, as if the murderer, in order that the door might be pushed open from without, had set the lock accordingly.

Now, why should he want to do that? The natural theory might be that it would be supposed some wandering night prowler, thus entering, had done the killing. Yet the real murderer, in his haste, had forgotten to rob, or even remove from his victim's hand the evidence of scarf and tie, thus upsetting the coherency of the plan he had probably devised to throw the police from the true trail.

It seemed to Tom as if the criminal, between haste, fear and the confusion of thought, had done whatever came uppermost in his mind, yet had done nothing with a clear perception of the nature of its probable interpretation by others.

Returning to the drawing-room he began a final search to see if any weapon that had been used were discoverable. Some scattering blood-stains near a sofa by the wall caused him to look beneath. Then he drew forth a piece of gas-pipe about two feet long. One end was covered with blood and scattering bits of gray hair. After the killing the murderer must have thrown down the bludgeon, and it had rolled under the sofa, thus further staining the carpet.

Boland now determined to give the alarm. He would like to have made further investigation, but he felt that the risk of keeping this horror longer to himself was growing with each passing moment. He turned the dead man's face back to its original position, but paused to examine the gas-pipe before replacing it under the sofa.

At this juncture footsteps were heard outside ascending the steps. Tom started forward, unthinkingly holding the bludgeon in his hand. The street door was flung open, and in ran a couple of policemen, who were followed by a man in plain clothes.

"Arrest that young man!" exclaimed the latter, pointing to the reporter. "I saw him in here as I started to enter the house a few minutes back. He was bending over his victim."

The officers seized Tom, who resisted vigorously.

"I am not your man!" he cried. "I am a reporter, and came here to interview the man whom I found dead."

But, appearances were against Boland and the police were incredulous.

"Take it easy, young fellow!" ordered one officer. "Clap on the bracelets, Mulligan."

As the handcuffs were snapped over his wrists Tom, perforce, ceased to resist.

"Mr. Leland, do you say that you saw this lad in here before you gave the alarm?" asked one of the patrolmen.

"I did." The man in citizen's clothing looked both nervous and excited. "I am Commodore Sutherland's nephew, and was coming here to see him on business. As I said, when I was about to enter, I saw this youth in the drawing-room. He was prowling about. The commodore's body was on the floor."

"Wasn't ye afear'd the bloke 'ud get away while ye rin afther us?" demanded Mulligan, a burly patrolman.

Leland acknowledged that he had thought of that, yet he hesitated to venture in on a probable murderer when alone and unarmed.

"Bedad! I'd 'ave locked the dure on him anyhow," was Mulligan's comment; to which Leland's reply was rather confused.

"Where are all the servants?" asked the officer of Leland. "Is the house deserted?"

"When I came up I rung the bell repeatedly," put in Tom, anxious to exculpate himself. "Then I leaned over the balaustre. I saw the body on the floor, and as the door was unlocked I came in, thinking that I might nose out a big thing for my paper."

"That may be so, but you'll go with us all the same. You can telephone your paper from the station, though I guess you won't get much of an answer."

Boland saw that but little faith was placed in either his protestations or explanations. At this moment the front door was again opened and a swish of skirts sounded in the hall. De Lancy Leland sprung to the doorway in order to prevent the new-comer from entering the drawing-room, but he was too late. Then Tom Boland beheld a bewitching vision of feminine loveliness looking in upon him and the rest. He noted a pair of large, limpid eyes glancing downward, while their wondering expression changed into one of fear and horror.

"Agnes," cried Leland, stepping forward and attempting to lead the girl from the room. "This is no sight for you."

But the girl, who seemed to be hardly as old as Boland, broke away from him, and, darting forward, took one long, recognizing look at the figure stretched on the carpet. She did not faint, but, after a gasping cry, checked herself and looked round upon them all, with her features convulsed by mental agony.

"Who has done this?" she faltered at length.

"Well, miss," said one of the officers, "we don't know, for certain. But we rather think this is the fellow."

She gazed upon Boland with fear, wonder, perplexity and aversion contending in her manner, then she turned to the corpse.

"Oh, my poor father!" she cried. "Who could—" Again she looked at the youth. "You seem too young to have done such a terrible thing. Is it sure that—I—I—"

"No!" exclaimed Tom, interrupting her energetically. "I did not do it. I wouldn't have harmed a hair of his head. Oh, believe that, miss! It is the truth."

"I—I do not think you guilty," she murmured, then sinking to the floor beside the body, she began to weep as if her heart was breaking.

Leland tried to lead her away, but she resisted. At this moment the old female servant who had acted as her escort, and who had fallen behind for some reason, came in. Agnes rose and fell sobbing into the woman's arms, after evincing a certain repugnance to Leland's very touch. She was assisted from the room. Then Mulligan took Tom by the arm.

"The gurrl may think ye're innocent. Sure I hope you are. But at prisint you'll say no more and come along wid me."

As he took Tom out, the young reporter saw a newspaper man coming up the steps, in a rush.

"We will be scooped, after all!" he thought, despairingly. "Well, this is tough. And I had such a pretty start of them all!"

As the patrol wagon bore him to Police Headquarters in Mulberry street, he felt that the only consoling feature in the whole business was the opinion expressed by the commodore's lovely daughter.

"Bless her heart!" he thought. "I seem to be down on my luck now, but, should the police fail, I will find the murderer of her father if it takes me ten years!"

But at present this valiant resolution was prettily discounted by his circumstances. At Headquarters he was at once taken into Inspector Byrnes's private room. The famous detective looked the lad over critically, then questioned him closely.

CHAPTER III.

FIRE! TOM AS A LISTENER.

WHILE Tom was replying as best he could a telephone was sent to the office, as follows:

"Have arrested a young man calling himself Thomas Boland on suspicion of murder. He claims to be one of your reporters. As your regular man is not here now, we suggest that you had better send one along at once. Commodore Sutherland has been killed."

Old Briggs in the editorial-rooms nearly fell to the floor as he stood with his ear at the receiver.

"What the deuce!" he exclaimed. Then ensued a brief, rapid interchange of questions and

replies that lasted about three minutes. "This is what comes of sending a green hand on such an assignment."

He felt like kicking himself, but tore into the reporters' room instead and dispatched two trusty men, who had come in, to the scene of the murder, with orders to rush the news no matter who was hurt or what it cost. A third reporter took a cab for Headquarters, where he was usually stationed at this time, but as ill-luck would have it, had returned to the office with other items.

"See what that little fool has to say for himself," was the night-editor's parting injunction, then he sat down and wiped the perspiration from his brow. "Hang it!" he soliloquized, when he was once more alone. "That kid might have made his fortune. It is the first time I ever knew of a man's getting himself killed for the benefit of his interviewer. And the commodore, too! Holy smoke! Boland might as well quit newspapering now."

The magnitude of the crime and the importance of the victim rendered the police hard to satisfy. Daylight was at hand before Tom walked out into the street, a free personage. As he went moodily down the street something began to hurt one of his feet. He took occasion to enter a barber-shop and remove his shoe and stocking. Then he found the scarf-pin, and also the remnant of necktie. He had concealed them inside his stocking, and during the anxieties inspired by his arrest he had forgotten them. As his identity was proved before being thoroughly searched the articles had escaped detection.

"Had I better turn them over to the police?" he asked himself. "No, I will not. They have not treated me with much consideration, and I am going to look into that murder a little myself. Must do it for my reputation's sake."

He stowed the articles away in his pocket; then, as he proceeded on his way, he bought a copy of the *World* and glanced over its still damp pages. He also secured copies of the other morning papers. The *World's* account was, if anything, less full and explicit than those of the *Herald*, *Sun* and *Tribune*. All the advantage that might have accrued from his early presence on the ground had been more than lost by his arrest. He had lost his chance. With maledictions on his own ill-luck and the blindness of the police, when egged on by Leland, he took his seat in one of the elevators and was hoisted to the editorial floor of his own paper.

Briggs was putting on his hat preparatory to leaving. Boland saw that there was blood in the night editor's eye, so to speak. Briggs returned to his desk and scribbled rapidly.

"Here is an order for your pay to date," he said, handing Tom a slip of paper. "You may consider yourself discharged without further notice."

"But, Mr. Briggs, I think I might convince the managing editor that I could not help being arrested and detained. Don't you?"

"You should have helped it, Boland," said Briggs. "A man who cannot help blundering, at such a time as that, has no business on a live newspaper."

"Is not this a little hard on a fellow?"

"Of course it is hard. We have to be hard with each other, in order to hold our own with the rest of the papers. I am sorry, Boland. But you had better try something else for a living, next time, besides reporting. You're not in it. There!"

Then Briggs took himself off to breakfast and to bed. Tom returned to the street, and wandering across City Hall Park, turned up Broadway, feeling rather dejected. He was almost a stranger in New York, and realized the difficulty of securing another job under present circumstances. His parents were not rich, and he felt too independent to burden them again. The cashier of the paper had paid him just twelve dollars. That, together with a little pocket change, was all that lay between him and utter destitution. Ten hours ago he had felt quite sure of making a name for himself on the staff. He even anticipated a round increase of salary, as a reward for the scoop he should have handed in. Now, every one who had heard of his recent effort was doubtless laughing at him. Yet he knew that he had been prompt, nervy and cool. Even yet, he did not see how, under the circumstances, he would have been justified in doing differently.

Inensibly his steps tended toward the scene of the murder. He did not feel like going to bed. At that early hour Fifth avenue was nearly deserted. While he stood behind a lamp-post, gazing gloomily at the Sutherland mansion, which he had finally reached, the front door opened,

and Tom saw De Lancy Leland descend the steps.

At sight of this man the youth's indignation rose. He also remembered what he had read and heard concerning the nephew of the commodore, and his reputed loss in the great railroad deal.

"As I have nothing else to do," Tom decided, "I believe I will keep an eye on you."

So he followed cautiously, while Leland walked rapidly down Fifth avenue to Broadway, and then turned eastward for several blocks, finally entering a saloon at the corner of a side street, where the neighborhood first began to appear somewhat disreputable. After a moment's reflection Tom also entered. There were several private stalls at one end, from one of which came a sound of voices. Tom sat down in an adjoining stall, ordered a lemonade, drew forth a paper, and sat there listening, though pretending to read.

No one else was in the saloon but the bartender, and Tom felt sure that he recognized the harsh, strident tones of the man who had denounced him to the police. The partition prevented him from seeing his neighbors, or being seen by them himself.

"How will to-night at midnight do?" asked a strange voice.

"No. We must give her time. I shall have a talk with her this afternoon. Then, if she fails to come to time, we can resort to force. I had rather proceed by milder means if possible."

The last speaker was Leland. So quiet was the room, that Tom, not four feet away, could hear every word through the thin, low partition.

"Well, sir," said the strange voice, "just as you think best. So's I'm paid, all's one to me. But it is my opinion, that, if she really won't go, the quicker you ask her go the better."

"Yes, yes. But we must go a little slow. Her father yet lies dead in the house. His slayer not yet known."

"I wonder now who did do up old Sutherland?"

"You need not look at me, doctor," protested Leland, and Tom detected vexation in his tone. "It is true that the commodore was the cause of my ruin in the last deal. Yet I would have scooped him had I been able. But when I marry his daughter it will all come back to me, with an additional million or two in the bargain."

"You have not married her yet, Leland. Many a man has been done up for a smaller loss than you sustained. But, all that is neither here nor there, with me. When must I make my move?"

"Not before I put the facts of the case squarely before her. The commodore died intestate. But I have had papers fixed up that make me administrator and guardian of his daughter. If she finally refuses to marry me, you and your assistants can step in with your lunacy proceedings and so on. Agnes is young, but she is within the legal matrimonial limit, especially when her guardian takes hold. She has no near relatives—none at all in fact, except me. I think she will be amenable to reason."

"If all goes well then, I am to receive—"

"One thousand dollars if you don't stir a peg. Five thousand if you find her out to be of unsound mind, and fifty a week for whatever time you keep her safe within the walls of that infernal retreat of yours. How is that for doing so light a job?"

"You overlook the other possible risks. A man is a fool to put himself in danger of Sing Sing, unless he is sure of a fat fee. Well, let me know when I am to move in the affair. I will go out from here first, Leland. We had better not be seen together in public more than necessary just now."

Boland, glancing over the top of his paper, saw a heavy set, pockmarked man go by who, he found out later on, was a certain Doctor Studley, proprietor of a private retreat for insane people somewhere on Long Island.

Leland remained sometime longer, as did Tom, for lack of something better to do. Finally the first went out, while Boland buried himself behind his paper in order to avoid any chance recognition. After waiting a few minutes Tom strolled leisurely out into the street, reflecting deeply.

"I have an idea that Miss Sutherland is the intended victim of a foul conspiracy," he said to himself. "If her immediate friends prove to be as indifferent as her only relative seems treacherous, she certainly needs help. I will look into this murder and defeat this scoundrel. Who said I was out of a job? Seems to me I have got a pretty big contract on hand right now. Let me see. What had better be my next move, I wonder?"

CHAPTER IV.

LELAND'S PROPOSAL. THE YOUNG WAITER.

"MARRY you? Never! I would rather be in my poor father's grave. It is revolting to think of marriage with any one, just now. It would be always revolting to me to think of marriage with you."

The speaker, a blue-eyed, graceful girl, just budding into early womanhood, pointed as she spoke toward the drawing-room door. Though pale with grief, her momentary anger only enhanced her rare and radiant beauty.

"I think you had better go at once," she added.

The man she addressed rose from his attitude of entreaty, with malevolent looks darting from his hard eyes. His sinister features showed mortification mixed with anger, and he bit his moustache nervously. But with an effort he diverted his show of passion into a bitter smile.

"Well, Agnes," he replied, "you certainly need a protector. I was in hopes you would take me. It is true we are cousins, yet our marriage, even at this sad time, would enable me to look out for your interests and keep together the scattered wealth that was your father's."

"I tell you frankly, Cousin De Lancy, I have no confidence in you; neither had my father. He was always opposed to my marrying you, although he befriended you often enough."

"But he is dead now, and I am your legal guardian and the administrator on your estate. You are a minor. I thought it would simplify matters if we married. The commodore evidently thought my head was level or he would not have left me in charge of you and yours."

"I do not believe he really did. This is some vile scheme of yours to revenge yourself on me because you were under heavy obligations to my father in Wall street."

Leland's eyes flashed ominously.

"You are not only a weak, silly girl," he hissed angrily, "but your mind seems to be already affected by grief over your father's awful death. Others have also noticed this. You are not only a child, incapable of managing your affairs, but you should be watched and restrained, lest you do something unwise, or worse."

"You are a fool, cousin, to talk to me like this. You will impose on no one by such slanders as these."

"Those gentlemen who saw you yesterday, Agnes, are physicians. You remember how cautiously, yet persistently, they questioned you? Your wild, angry replies, your flighty behavior, were carefully noted. Do you know what these men have done?"

"I know that they seemed impertinent and presuming. What business had they here?"

"They were here to certify to your unsoundness of mind."

"Good Heavens! And yet you would marry me! Are you really anxious to marry a crazy person, De Lancy?"

In spite of her visible alarm he saw that she had penetrated the hollowness of his various assertions, and the knowledge added to his anger by increasing his confusion.

"It is all a base conspiracy," she added, as if to herself. "God help me! Where will it end?"

"It will end in your doing as I say, Agnes," he blustered. "Otherwise, I shall use my legal authority to have you conveyed to an asylum until your reason is restored."

"My reason! I used to suspect that you were a villain. Now I know you are one. Leave the room! I wish to be alone."

"Not until you have promised to be my wife. Then all will be well. Otherwise, as I said, Doctor Studley's private retreat is your only refuge, perhaps for years, perhaps for life."

A slight scream was the response to this heartless alternative, then Agnes sunk into a chair, buried her face in her hands and burst into tears. Then came a knock on the door, which at once opened and a very young man in a waiter's garb, with a napkin thrown over his arm, appeared. He was a medium-sized, thin-faced youth of swarthy complexion, with long, curling black hair. One rather odd thing about him for a waiter was that he wore a pair of smoked glasses, as if his eyes were weak.

"Luncheon is served, ma'am," he said to Miss Sutherland.

"What do you mean by entering here unbidden?" demanded Leland roughly. "Leave the room!"

"He shall not go!" said the girl energetically. "His presence will at least protect me from further insult."

Leland looked knowing, as if her use of such pronounced language before a servant might be

adduced as further evidence of her alleged mental unsoundness, then he took up his hat.

"Well, he may remain," he assented. "But you have heard my ultimatum." He drew close and whispered. "If by this time to-morrow you do not consent to my proposal, the other means I spoke of shall be at once employed. I am your guardian and I have full authority." Then to the waiter. "Out of my way, fellow!"

Mr. Leland strode from the room, jumped into his private hansom and drove rapidly to his club. Had he been aware that this same Italian-looking servant had been listening at the keyhole for several minutes previous to his entrance, probably the commodore's nephew would have been yet more angry than he was.

Agnes, who had plunged into sad reflection upon her cousin's withdrawal, at length raised her eyes. She had forgotten the waiter for the moment. He was regarding her respectfully. Something in his manner inspired confidence, and she felt very helpless and friendless just then, notwithstanding her brave words to Leland.

After the commodore's burial, her cousin's forged letters of guardianship and administratorship had been recognized by the surrogate, so deftly had Leland done his work, and he had at once assumed the legal control over her affairs which he claimed to be authorized to have. As she was just out of school, and with but few intimate friends in New York, notwithstanding her father's high position, she found the strangeness of her situation equaled only by its apparent helplessness.

Under plea of the disagreeable associations connected with the murder, Leland had persuaded Agnes to go to another house that was in charge of her father's butler, who was a creature totally under Leland's influence. This man controlled the under-servants, and as things were now arranged, every movement of the girl was watched and reported. No wonder she felt hopeless. Her father's murderer was undetected, she and her property were in Leland's hands, there were no friends near by sufficiently cognizant of her situation to interfere that she knew of, and she herself had only recently returned from a three-years' absence at a distant school in New England.

Still looking at the waiter, she approached him slowly, while a wan smile replaced the brooding melancholy that had characterized her aspect.

"You look to me as if you might be trusted," she said in a wonderfully winning voice, with a suggestion of sadness in its tone that affected the youth greatly, although he gave no sign. "Do you think I may trust you?"

CHAPTER V.

THAT CROSS-EYED BUTLER. THE COAL-HOUSE.

THE waiter regarded the commodore's daughter so ardently that, perhaps, it was well that his glasses concealed his eyes.

"I am sure you may trust me," he replied earnestly. "If you will let me bring your luncheon into the library and wait on you there, I will prove to you that I am sincere."

Though she did not reply in words, she moved toward the room in question and the waiter retired. In a moment or two he reappeared bearing a tray covered with eatables, which he rather clumsily arranged on a small table. Then he opened a bottle of claret. Agnes, wearily watching, smiled slightly.

"You do not appear to be a practiced hand," she ventured to say.

"Perhaps not, miss," returned he, placing a chair for her then drawing back. "But waiting on tables is not what I am really here for. I am here to serve you! See?"

The girl almost screamed as she beheld him divest himself, not only of his glasses but his ebony curls, disclosing close-cropped light hair, and keen gray eyes that did not seem to be at all weak. Suddenly she grew pale.

"Do you recognize me?" he asked.

"You—were—"

"Yes; I am the young reporter who was arrested by mistake on the night of your father's death."

"I thought you were when you removed the glasses. I felt all the time that you were not guilty."

"But I lost my place, all the same, through that very blunder."

"Poor fellow!" This sympathetically. "And then you had to become a servant, I suppose."

"I didn't have to, but I chose to in order to secure another position."

"Another position?" Agnes looked up from the luncheon she was pretending to eat. "I fear I do not exactly understand."

"Yes, to secure another position—one that will enable me to—to protect you."

The girl dropped her knife and fork.

"Don't you see?" Tom added, earnestly. "If I can succeed in protecting you from those who wish to do you harm, my reward will be ample for having had to appear as a servant. If I add to this that I hope to find out the real murderer of your father, then—"

"Yes, then—" joined in Agnes, eagerly, for she was already infected by his confidence in himself.

"Why, then I might get back my old job on the newspaper again."

At this they both laughed, and the assumed waiter again put on his disguise and stood at the back of her chair as he related to her most of the events with which the reader is already familiar. From the first the almost friendless girl trusted him implicitly.

"Then," continued Boland, "when I saw what this cousin of yours was up to, I made up my mind that I would devote my energies to saving you if I could; that is, if you authorized me to go ahead. You can always count on Tom Boland."

"I believe in you," she said, reassuringly. "And I will confide in you. Rich as I am, in money matters, I am poor in friends; true friends, I mean."

"You will never have a truer one than I, miss. Please believe that. Now I will take these dishes down or I may be suspected. That cross-eyed butler is terribly suspicious. He hired me only yesterday, but I am onto his little game, already. You must do nothing whatever until you see me again."

Boland started, stopped, put down his tray and respectfully kissed the young lady's hand—a proceeding she but faintly resisted, though blushing brightly the while. Then he hurried out, while Agnes, leaving the library, went flying up-stairs.

Meanwhile, in a room below, a cross-eyed man had been listening at the flue leading to the library register, which was open, and every word uttered by the two young people had been heard by him easily. This unseen auditor now drew a long breath and slowly scratched his head.

"Well, I will be cursed!" he at length ejaculated.

It was the butler, who was the trusted spy and servitor of De Lancy Leland! He was a husky-voiced, bald-headed, broad-faced man, who usually walked about as if he were stepping on eggs.

"I must look into this," he muttered, as he glided softly toward the kitchen, where the new waiter was just setting down his dishes. "Tony," said the butler, "come with me out to the coal-house. There is something there we must set to rights."

He led the way to a small out-building at the further end of the back yard and unfastened the door, which was a heavy one and secured by a strong padlock.

"In with you, Tony," he directed, pointing to a pile of coal at the further end. "We must get this coal into the house first. Then—"

Tom, who had unsuspectingly entered, heard the butler's words interrupted by a slamming-to of the door. As he wheeled round the lock snapped and he realized all at once that he was a prisoner!

"Open that door," he shouted, then flung his whole weight against it. "Open it, I say!"

But the strong lock would not yield. He heard the butler's sullen laugh echo dimly. The sound enraged the lad, and he again exerted his whole strength upon the door, at the same time shouting:

"You had better let me out, else there will be trouble."

"Better take it easy, until master comes," said the butler from without. "Hollerin' won't help ye one bit. Master will talk to you better than I can, Mister Tom Boland."

"Euchered, by the Lord Harry!" ejaculated Tom.

"I say," called the butler, as he chuckled slowly. "Next time you want to talk with the young missus, perhaps you'd better close the register. He-he-he!"

Then he went away, and for several long hours the young man fumed, fretted and tried in vain to extricate himself. But the out-house was of brick and as strong as a prison. At last he crouched down in one corner and waited in sulken silence, while the daylight slowly waned and the night approached. The street-lamps were

lighted when he heard steps draw near and the padlock creaked as it was unfastened. The door slightly opened. Tom heard the voice of the butler.

"Master haven't come yet. I've brought you a bite of supper, though it is more than you deserve. Come here and get it or you will do without till breakfast."

"All right," mumbled Tom, as if he had just awokened from a nap. "Ha-hum! Believe I must have been asleep. My, what a cramp I've got in that leg! Please, sir, would you mind setting the dish on that empty barrel by the door? I am just that stiff I can hardly move."

While the butler, grumbling at the youth's "laziness," put one foot inside in order to reach the barrel Tom sprung noiselessly forward. The man's outstretched arm was seized and he was jerked violently, stumbling over the sill as he fell to the ground. The plate was shattered scattering the food. But before he could move further, or even cry out, his throat was grasped and squeezed until he could barely breathe. Then a knotted handkerchief was thrust into his mouth and drawn tight behind his ears, so tight that the blood nearly gushed from the corners of his lips. A pair of handcuffs, which Tom, as a self-constituted detective, had provided himself with as a matter of course, were snapped about his wrists behind his back, and his legs were bound with strips from the butler's own apron. In two minutes the man lay as helpless as a new-born babe, unable even to call out.

"Now, my friend," said Tom, "I am sorry to have to return your offer of supper in this way, but, as I've got another appointment, it is necessary for me to leave without the pleasure of seeing your master here. Have to let you take my place. You may tell him that, though you think you have foiled me to-day, he will hear from me soon enough again, especially if he attempts anything against the peace or freedom of Miss Sutherland. Ta-ta, old boy!"

Boland now left the coal-house, locked the door, and threw the key over into the adjacent alley.

"Grunt away!" he muttered, as he heard the butler's efforts to release himself. "You will work a good while before you succeed, if I am any judge of knots and handcuffs. Lucky I provided myself with dabs and pistol. Didn't think I would need the first so soon. Perhaps it won't be long before I will have a use for the second."

But, instead of escaping by the back yard gate, Tom now boldly made his way to the house again and entered.

CHAPTER VI.

AN INTERRUPTION.

BOLAND'S idea was that, as the butler probably had not made public his knowledge of the young man's identity in view of Leland's continued absence, the risk of re-entering the house would not be great, and the possibility of learning something serviceable thereby ought not to be neglected.

He was still in his waiter's costume. Avoiding the kitchen and the cook, he stole through the basement corridor that led by a stairway to the upper front hall. The drawing-rooms and library were in darkness. Then he crept up to the second floor and there met Miss Sutherland's maid, who uttered a low exclamation of alarm.

"It is only Tony," said Tom, trusting still to prevarication. "Where can I find your mistress? Cook wants to send up supper."

"Cook must be crazy," said the maid. "Miss Sutherland have had tea and she be walkin' in the Square."

"The very thing for me," thought Tom, and making a brief excuse for his error, he ran down to the basement, put on his hat and coat, and sought the street through the rear exit by way of the alley.

In the quiet little Square before the house he came across Miss Sutherland under the trees. He soon made his altered situation known, and though she seemed glad to see him, her nervous start when he told how the butler had overheard and frustrated his first plans, evinced that she was much alarmed. Yet, when he related how he had evened up things with that cross-eyed functionary, she laughed, but suddenly looked serious again.

"I shall be deprived of your services just as I was beginning to feel that I had one true friend," she said sadly.

"Not so, miss. We will merely have to change our programme."

"Let us sit down on this bench and talk it over."

So they seated themselves at a retired nook where the electric light shone dimly and the surrounding shrubbery was thick.

"Of course," explained Boland, "I will not be a waiter any longer. But there are other ways for me to aid you. Have you no relatives or near friends who would receive you if you left this house here? Leland is too great a rascal to take charge of you, even if he is your guardian, which—by the way—I don't believe at all."

"I have acquaintances here. But the few real friends of mine are in other parts of the country. Having been away so long I am almost a stranger to my father's friends here. Besides, De Lancy would undoubtedly make any one with whom I took refuge, give me up."

"I have it!" exclaimed Tom. "But you will trust yourself entirely to me? I shall be true."

"I have no one but you to trust now."

"I am young, I know. But I would die for you if necessary."

"I feel sure that you mean well."

"This Leland has threatened you with confinement in a mad-house, hasn't he? Well, you remain quiet. Seem to assent to whatever he requires, except to insist on delay as far as the marriage goes. Then wait until you hear from me again. You must also be ready to fly at a moment's notice whenever I say the word."

"Would going off with you be—be exactly proper?" This with a modest blush.

"Yes, under the circumstances. I should only take you to my mother. She is a dear good woman. My parents live in the country. That fellow will never find you there and she will care for you as if you were a daughter. She cannot help loving you if you will allow her to."

"But will not Cousin Leland still have authority over my property? Can he not, at any time, take charge of me, should he find me? It will be four years yet before I am twenty-one."

Boland knit his brow in deep thought, then his face brightened as he said:

"You will have to trust to what can be afterward done. I think your cousin's guardianship over you and your property can be set aside. In fact, I feel sure that it can."

"That would be delightful. But how?"

Tom leaned forward and whispered in the girl's ear. Her face took on an expression of amazement and fear.

"It is horrible!" she exclaimed.

"Horrible enough," commented Tom. "But I have a conviction that De Lancy Leland is base enough for anything."

"Is he?" hissed a harsh, grating voice directly behind the two young people. "We will see about that."

Boland jumped to his feet with one hand on his revolver, and Miss Sutherland uttered a low cry of dismay. Then the form of a man thrust itself between the youth and the girl, and turning, grasped the arm of Agnes.

It was Leland himself, white with rage as his sinister eyes burned with a baleful light! Beside him was the cross-eyed butler.

"It is you, is it?" to Tom, whom he at once recognized, for the lad had lost his glasses in the fracas at the coal-house. "Not content with blundering over the corpse of my poor uncle, you must meddle in my affairs. Pity the police could not hold you. But if I cause your arrest, you will scarcely go free so easy. Now, go!"

He pointed down the graveled path, but Boland merely smiled.

"I said for you to go!" insisted Leland. "If you remain in this neighborhood, I will have you run in."

"I hardly think you will," returned Tom, calmly, as he drew something from an inside pocket of his coat. Do you see this?"

Under the flare of the distant electric light something flashed brightly as he stretched forth his arm. It was a diamond scarf-pin of a peculiar shape. Around the stones was a crest of arms in filagree-work.

Leland staggered back with features gray as those of a corpse. Agnes seemed to recognize the coat of arms. Boland bent forward.

"Do you know where I found that?" he demanded.

Leland gazed vacantly, like a man stricken with palsy.

"It was in his hand," added the youth, rapidly. "There was a piece of torn necktie there, too. There was blood on both."

Without giving the amazed man time to recover, Tom turned from him, lifted his hat to Agnes and said, with meaning emphasis:

"Remember!"

Then he walked rapidly away toward one of the entrances to the Square.

He had gone perhaps thirty yards when Leland recovered his nerve.

"After that fellow!" he urged to his attendant. "Don't lose sight of him. See where he stops—what he does—if you have to shadow him until morning. And hark!"

He whispered in the butler's ear.

The cross-eyed man nodded and slipped quietly away. Leland turned to the commodore's daughter. He attempted to draw her arm within his own, but she resisted with such unmistakable aversion that he bit his lip in fury.

"I will go with you, since I must," she said, "but you shall not touch me. Besides, what did that young man mean by producing that pin? I surely recognized your coat of arms."

They were walking toward the house now. Leland did not reply until he had carefully closed the door behind them both.

"You are too curious," he said. "The fellow stole the pin, of course. His impudence needs taking down."

"I do not believe that, De Lancy. He is certainly an honest—"

"Silence!" he harshly interrupted. "What do you know of such vagabonds as he? You seem so determined to thwart me that I must take stringent measures. Once for all, will you quietly marry me and thus avoid a restraint which will be as unpleasant to you as the imposition of it will be irksome to me?"

"No!" she defiantly replied, forgetting in her anger the advice as to delay given by Tom before they were thus interrupted. "A hundred times no! Not if you were the last man on earth."

He clinched his fist as if about to strike her, but restrained himself with an effort.

"Very well," he rejoined. "On your head be the blame for whatever may follow. You must be ready to leave here at daylight."

"Where am I to go?" she asked, feeling a sudden thrill of alarm that dashed her anger aside.

"That you will know, in due time. You need not try to run away. I shall not allow you to go out again. Every door and window is secured, and you yourself are watched. You may have fooled me once, but I hardly think you will, again."

By this time they were up-stairs in her own sitting-room. Without waiting to hear more he now abruptly went out. Agnes sunk back into a chair. She felt discouraged. Adroit as Boland appeared to be, it seemed as if Leland were fully his equal at that sort of game, besides having the advantage of possessing both money and personal influence.

She trembled and wept. If Tom's suggestions and the hint conveyed by the mysterious pin were true, she was in the power of a man who would stop at no crime which he might deem necessary in order to compass his purposes. And he was her legal guardian!

"What shall I do?" she faltered. "God have mercy! What can I do?"

CHAPTER VII.

SHADOWED, SMALLEY AND THE BUTLER.

WHEN young Boland departed from the Square, he passed down the street he happened to be on, until he came to Fourth avenue; then he made his way down-town. Once, after stopping to light a cigarette, and remove his wig, he noticed a man over the way pause in an adjacent doorway. Presently he looked back.

As he suspected, the man was following.

Tom made several detours, but soon found that this shadow was not to be easily shaken off. Finally, as the man passed a jeweler's window diagonally across the street, the youth thought he recognized the cross-eyed butler.

"Leland must be scared," thought Tom, "or that bloke would not be on my track. I must give him the shake. I wonder how he got out of the coal-house so quick?"

The young reporter increased his pace and presently turned into the upper Bowery, where the increasing crowds of wayfarers promised to assist in his escape. Watching his chance he darted into the side door of a certain well-known resort for printers and newspaper-men, and looked eagerly about. Then he hurried across the long bar and billiard-room and tapped a round-faced, jolly-looking young man on the shoulder. The latter was idly watching a game from one of the chairs against the wall.

"Hello, Smalley!" accosted Boland. "I want you to do me a favor."

"All right, youngster," returned Smalley, somewhat cautiously, as if he feared that Tom

might want to borrow money. "We'll see about it. Heard you got the bounce. Where have you been keeping yourself?"

"Been knocking about. But, I say! If a cross-eyed man in a sort of waiter's dress comes in here, just swing to him, will you? Keep him in tow for a moment or two."

"Very well, sonny." Smalley was eying Boland's garb the while. "I'll tackle him. Bu', are you really down to slinging hash in a restaurant?"

"Well, not exactly!"

"Dev'lish mean in old Briggs to give you the sack. You'll do better when you have more experience. Broke!"

"Not yet. Can't explain, but I am on a new lay now. It may pan out a good thing if I can work it out. Look sharp! There is my man."

Tom darted behind a screen and made his way out without being seen, just as the cross-eyed butler entered from the other side and stood looking cautiously about. Smalley sauntered up to him, looked him carefully over, then he held out his hand.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "Why, how are you, Dick? When did you get back?" Then he rattled on with a string of effusive nonsense at a pace that gave the astonished butler no chance to say a word for a moment or more.

"I don't think I remember you," said the shadower, as soon as he could make himself heard, and moving off at the same time.

But, Smalley was after him with an air of social insistence, and thrusting his arm through the butler's, bore him gently but irresistibly to the bar.

"Well, I remember you perfectly," averred Smalley, gayly. "Long time, though, since we met. Smalley is my name. What will you take?"

The butler, finding his new acquaintance persistent, took something red, with lemon and sugar attached thereto, and again looked around the room.

"Looking for somebody, Dick?" asked Smalley. "Mighty apt to find him here. Great place this. But, I say, what is the matter? You look as if you had wallowed in a coal-bin?"

The butler winced at Smalley's accidental accuracy. The back of his coat was covered with coal-dust, he having had no time to brush up when found by Leland, who had entered the house by the rear way as was sometimes his wont, and who had heard the butler's groans, had released him, heard the explanations and then made his servitor follow him at once in search of Agnes, the housemaid telling them that she was in the Square.

"But, that's all right," continued Smalley. "I get a jag on myself, now and then. I'm afraid you'll have a head on you in the morning, old boy."

Thus, on one pretext or another, he managed to detain the man for several minutes; then Mr. Smalley suddenly remembered that he had forgotten a pressing engagement and tore himself away from his friend, Dick, with some appearance of regret, having, the while, dexterously forestalled all attempts on the butler's part to either explain or withdraw. Then he walked slowly down the Bowery to another well-known resort near Park Row. He stood in the doorway, quite oblivious of that engagement, and finding himself, on the whole, feeling rather dull.

"Wish I was at work," he thought. "For fifty cents in nickels I'd give this blessed burg the shake. One might as well get jagged at once as to be reduced to kill time in this shape. Hullo here! Look where you're going, will you?"

This remark was brought out by his being rudely shouldered by a seedy-looking youth with spectacles and a moustache, who seemed to have taken on the kind of "jag" which Smalley had alluded to in his solitary communings. The fellow steadied himself against the door-post and peering into Smalley's face, grinned in an idiotic manner.

"G'way! You're too full for my company," said Smalley, starting away, but the other boldly held him back by the collar.

"If you fail to recognize me in this get-up, guess I'm safe enough," remarked the newcomer, suddenly sobering up. "Don't you know Tom Boland, man?"

"Well, I swear!" Smalley was tickled as well as amazed. "I even fancied I could smell your breath. Come! This is immense! What are you up to, anyhow?"

Tom's waiter's garb had been exchanged for a half-shabby cutaway coat, loud trowsers, and a brown derby. He wore his own short hair, but had donned a reddish-brown mustache and a

different pair of eye-glasses. A peculiar limp, as if one leg was stiff, also strengthened the disguise.

"I see you have given Cross-eyes the shake," said Tom. "I hardly think he will recognize me in this rig. Let us go into Hilton's and have some oysters. As I said before, I am on a little lay and find that I need help. I understood that you were temporarily laid off. How would you like to take a hand in a little racket that promises to turn out the biggest kind of a sensation?"

"Well, that depends. Any money in it, my boy?"

"Scadoodles of it if we succeed! But that is not all, Smalley. We are to rescue beauty in distress—avenge a foul crime and all that sort of thing."

"Sounds old-time-novelish. Any risks to run?"

"Of course. But none that cannot be surmounted. Tell you what, Small; you are a good fellow. I'll let you in on the ground floor."

Smalley was interested, but dubious. They talked it over while discussing their oysters, and Boland grew eloquent in depicting the possible advantages that might accrue from a vigorous pushing of this Sutherland affair, privately, on their own hook.

"Come with me to my room, Smalley," urged Tom, as he paid the bill and they strolled out to the street. "I will explain just what I want an assistant for and what you will have to do."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD CLOTHES MAN. CONSPIRATORS.

NEARLY a fortnight after the events recorded in the preceding chapter, Swivel, the cross-eyed butler, was called from the kitchen to the back-yard gate of the Leland house by a knock.

He admitted a hump-backed man, whose face was nearly hidden by a thick beard. His general appearance was that of a second-hand dealer in old clothing something down upon his luck.

"Swivel, my poy," said this person as he pushed his way inside, "I thought ash how you would nefer let me in. Have you collected all your master's old clothes?"

"Come, now," returned Swivel shrewdly; "I know you haven't been hanging round for a week just to get a few old clothes. What are you up to, anyhow?"

"S'help me gracious!" exclaimed the other in awkwardly expressed surprise. "What else should I want? I am a poor man, undt trade is very pad—exsheedingly pad. Your master, he has gone, undt he leafs you in sharge. Well, now. I get dem clothes of you, sheap. You no want 'em yourself."

The cross-eyed butler leaned forward and smiled knowingly.

"I want to know your little game," said he. "You are no more an old-clothes dealer than I am an angel. I've only been waiting for a good chance to tell you so—see?"

As he spoke he jerked the hump-backed man's hat from the latter's head with a swift movement, bringing with it also a bushy wig and beard. Then he fell back in amazement at this result, for confronting him were the sharp features and keen eyes of the young man who had turned the tables on him in the coal-house!

But, while he stared, Boland leaped upon him and the two went down under the kitchen table, for they had entered the house meanwhile.

Presently the butler began to call for help.

"Call away!" said Tom. "Don't I know that you have been alone here for ten days? There, take that."

He forced something tightly over the butler's mouth and nose, despite the latter's struggles, which soon grew fainter, and finally ceased altogether. Tom rose, took from his pockets some small rope and bound the butler securely. Then he seated himself, drew a revolver and calmly waited for the man to revive, which he presently did, with a sneeze, a growl and an ineffectual effort to release himself from his bonds.

"I rather think I have bested you again, Mr. Swivel," remarked Boland, affecting a lazy drawl.

"You must be the devil," groaned the butler. "But, I have had enough of this foolishness. Let me up."

"Not just yet. I did not intend to unmask until my pal comes, but you were so very eager, you know, that I had to precipitate matters a little. No, you must lie quiet a bit."

"Do you mean to rob the house? If so I can still raise an alarm."

"Yes, and get either a ball in your goozle or another gag in your mouth. It's healthiest for you to keep quiet. We may need your help."

"I'll see you hanged before I help you except to clap you in jail." Said with vicious emphasis.

"Excuse me," said Tom. "I think you will assist us when we are ready for you to do so."

"That's cool. Why, I'd like to know?"

"Because your life is at stake—see?" The butler sneered. "Now listen to me, you scoundrel." Tom, dropping his affected drawl, spoke sharp and stern. "I have got you and your precious master down fine. He will be here to-night." Swivel started involuntarily. "I see you understand. Some one will meet him here—some one who was in Commodore Sutherland's house on the night of the murder. Some one also saw to it that the servants should be out of the way when the deed was done."

"How do you know that?" demanded Swivel, startled into a certain wildness of manner. "Are you the very devil himself?"

"I will prove worse than the devil to you if you interfere, either by word, look or movement with the programme I have arranged to carry out here to-night. Do you suppose I have been selling old clothes for nothing, this week or more?"

The butler twisted about uneasily, regarding Tom with both fear and aversion. Young Boland continued:

"When Leland comes here, you are to receive him just as usual, never letting him know about me or my partner being on hand. You will take him to his room on the second floor and see that he stays there. When that other person arrives, show him in to your master and let their interview take place there. D'ye understand?"

Swivel grunted in an unmeaning sort of way.

"When my partner comes he will be in the wake of that other fellow. Take him into the room adjoining the one your master and his guest will be in."

"Bloody nice programme this. Where will you happen to be?"

"Never mind. I shall be on hand to riddle you with bullets if you fail in the least to do as I say. I shall turn the gas off and keep the key of the meter. I found out you had one when I was a waiter here. You will say to Leland that the company are having some pipes mended, and serve him with candles, which I know you have on hand. The house will be dark and my plan be less liable to interruption."

Then Boland disappeared down the cellar stairs. Swivel struggled desperately to release himself, and his face was red with ineffectual exertion as Tom soon returned.

"I have turned off the gas," he remarked. "Now, as it is getting dark, we will light this candle. I see one sign of good old aristocracy here; you don't have any vulgar lamps about. Nothing but gas and good wax-candles. Now, old man, I'm going to set you free. I'll borrow your pocket-knife, and I know you have no other weapons in the house except a carver and butcher, which I will also look after. If you are quiet and docile—all well. But one wrong step, one misplaced word—nay, one suspicious quiver of your eyelid, and I'll do a little murdering, myself. Remember; this is a desperate game, and I and my pal are not only armed but actually thirsting for gore! It's all I can do to keep my finger from a trigger, right now."

Boland, while speaking, loosed Swivel's bonds, but kept a wary eye on his least movement. The butler arose to his feet and stood there obedient but sullen. The extraordinary nerve and dexterity of the young man had evidently awed the fellow, somewhat.

At this juncture the door-bell rung loudly.

"Well, why are you not getting a move on yourself?" demanded Boland. "Remember, I shall be watching," and he showed his pistol significantly as Swivel moved off.

"What makes you so slow?" growled Leland as his butler at last opened the street-door.

"Think I must have been nodding, sir." As he spoke Swivel glanced nervously toward a dark recess under the hall-stairs where he knew Boland had ensconced himself with a cocked revolver.

"Well, show me into a warm room and be quick about it. I don't pay you to nod."

Leland seemed to be in a bad humor and followed the butler up-stairs, grumbling as he went. The heat had been turned on from the furnace, but as Swivel placed a lighted candle on the table Leland ordered him to light the gas.

Swivel explained, according to Boland's instructions, for he felt the presence of the latter's eye and pistol in his very bones.

"Curse the gas company!" growled Leland. "Set out some wine and brandy. We shall need something strong for this night's work."

The butler brought bottles and glasses, then was ordered to remain and pay attention.

"I have some things to say concerning your own safety as well as mine, Swivel," informed Leland after helping himself to brandy.

The butler glanced nervously behind him. There was a *portière* which concealed sliding doors that led into the next room. Over this doorway was a transom. A slight—a very slight creaking sound was now heard.

"What is that?" demanded Leland, who was also nervous as well as irritable.

"A swinging window-blind, I guess. But had you not better be cautious about what you say, sir? Sometimes the very walls have ears."

"You are very squeamish, all at once," sneered Leland feeling the brandy in his veins. "How much did I have to pay you to see that all the other servants were out of the house—that night?"

"H-s-s-h!" whispered Swivel, as a cold perspiration started on his brow. "What's the use of going over this? The pay is all right."

"Yes; but your part of the work is not, by a devilish sight! One man was left in the house. He went for me afterward and I had to come down handsomely in order to close his mouth. He will come again, I guess, and keep coming."

"I thought all were gone," whispered Swivel, who, between his fear of Leland's saying too much, with Boland as a secret auditor, and his dread of the latter's pistol, was nearly beside himself, being cowardly at heart. "But, why rake things up that cannot be helped? I tried to do the best I could."

"Well, mark me! You have not got all your pay yet. Unless you strictly do all I want done, you won't get it either. If it comes to the law, you are in for it as well as the others, as an accessory."

"Well," said Swivel, in dogged desperation, "what else is it I am to do? Do not talk so loud, sir, if you please."

Leland's back was toward the *portière*. As Swivel spoke, the butler saw the curtains slowly part and the face of Boland appear. Tom shook his head menacingly, as an intimation to Swivel that his master must be allowed to talk. The butler shuddered as he noted the gleam of Tom's pistol-barrel. Then the face disappeared as the curtain fell.

"What the deuce is the matter with you?" demanded Leland. "Drink that and put some courage into your shaking bones. I'm tired of looking at your ugly yellow face."

Swivel gulped down a glass of raw spirits, while his master, leaning far across the table, fixed on the servant a burning gaze.

"This chap who is coming here must never leave this house alive!" he whispered, in accents of startling intensity.

Swivel could only stare helplessly.

"We must make way with him—we! Do you understand?"

"I—I dare not," began the butler; "I can't—"

"Oh, yes you can. It only requires a little nerve and shrewd management. Remember! As I said before, in helping me to conceal the real cause of the commodore's death, you are guilty before the law. If I am arrested you will be. How does that strike you?"

Apparently it struck him hard, for Mr. Swivel appeared to be on the point of a total collapse. Leland smiled grimly.

"I see you understand," he continued. "Your only safe course is to keep on, with me. The only witness of my—of our guilt, will be here very shortly. He will come alone. He must not go back—alive."

"But h-h-ow shall we—" Swivel could hardly talk at all.

Leland drew forth a very small vial containing a few grains of a white crystalline powder.

"Leave that part to me," said he. "What are you afraid of? We are alone and will be uninterrupted. This house is closed until the Christmas holidays, is it not? Miss Sutherland and myself are in the country, are we not, and for the benefit of her health? You are merely here to look after things and are on board wages, are you not?" Leland laughed at his own grim, humorous way of putting things; then he grew grave. "All you need do is to assist me to dispose of the body—d'ye hear, my man?"

The butler heard, but his heart was like ice as he thought of Boland listening to every word over his cocked pistol! For him the situation was almost maddening.

"That is all," continued Leland, staring at the vial, and all unconscious of the unseen

auditor behind the *portière*. "When he swallows this the work is done."

Again the bell rung below.

"Let him in!" ordered Leland. "Lock the door and pocket the key. We do not want to be interrupted."

Swivel staggered from the room, and Leland again helped himself to the brandy.

On the dark stairway Boland intercepted the butler.

CHAPTER IX.

SIGNOR FRANCONI. WHAT SMALLEY DOES.

THE young reporter thrust the barrel of his pistol against the craven's temple as he softly accompanied him to the lower hall.

"Listen," he whispered. "Leave that key in the door. I am going to probe your master's villainy to the bottom. At the slightest sign of your treachery you are a dead man. Your only chance of safety lies in your keeping faith with me. Now go. Remember I am watching you."

The butler, like a man in a state of mental coma, opened the street-door and admitted a thin, shambling figure, that followed him upstairs without a word. A solitary candle burned in the lower hall. By its dim light Tom, from his point of concealment, no sooner saw that the front door was left so that Smalley, who was now his partner, could enter safely, than he fastened to his post behind the *portière* in the room back of the one where the three others now were. There he could overhear and see everything. Knowing Swivel's cowardice he felt himself measurably master of the situation.

"Glad to see you, Franconi," said Leland carelessly as the butler ushered the new-comer in, who looked like an artist very much at war with good fortune. "Sit down and have something."

All three then "had something." After that came an interval of silence, in which the parties appeared to be watching each other with suspicion. Tom, outside, heard the front door open and close softly. He glided to the head of the stairs and beckoned to an approaching figure. Then the two disappeared inside of the back second-story room.

"Now, Franconi," began Leland at length, "I suppose you have an idea as to why I want to see you here to-night?"

"I know that I am hard up," replied Franconi, with an insinuating smile, that was somewhat contradicted by the snake-like gleam of his narrow black eyes.

"That means—cold cash—does it not?"

"Ab, yes. Plenta of money. You have so much of money. It is vera hard for one so poor as I to keep the tongue still."

"I suppose you are aware that the police will give you nothing," remarked Leland coolly. "The governor's reward is only one thousand. Now, I will give you ten thousand and a ticket to China, Africa, anywhere, so that you agree never to set foot in America again."

The Italian seemed to reflect.

"I think the Mees Sutherland might give twenty thousand to know—a—to know—just what I happen to know about—"

"Possibly. But I am Miss Sutherland's guardian. She is a minor. I control every dollar of her father's estate at present."

Franconi chewed at his whiskers in silence. Suddenly he broke into a ravishing smile.

"I cannot resist you," he said sweetly. "I will go to the end of all this world—stay there—come back never—keep hold of my tongue forever—for—for—"

"For ten thousand. Well, then, we will—"

"For twenty-five thousand," added Franconi, beaming benignantly upon his auditors.

"The deuce you will!"

Leland glared upon the sallow-faced, shabby-looking foreigner malevolently. But he controlled himself.

"All right," said he, breaking into a laugh. "You shall have the cash in the shape of a draft on some foreign bank, whenever my servant here sees you safely on board of an outgoing steamer. Let us bind the bargain with another glass."

The glasses were filled by Swivel, whose face was still very white. As Franconi turned aside to place his hat in the chair, Leland dropped the powder from the vial into the Italian's glass where it instantly dissolved. The butler was shaking in every limb.

"Here we go," said Leland, biting his lips to disguise their tremulousness, while Franconi raised the glass to his mouth. But before he had drank the door-bell rung.

The three men set their glasses down untouched.

"Who can that be?" exclaimed Leland, greatly alarmed. "Run down and see, Swivel."

The butler obeyed. As he disappeared down the dark stairway, Leland, carried away by an ungovernable anxiety, followed to the head of the stairs and peered down. Franconi, also curious, accompanied him, leaving the room vacant for a moment. Then the *portière* was drawn aside. Smalley, pistol in hand, darted noiselessly forth, threw the contents of the poisoned glass into the empty grate, and refilled it from the open bottle. Then he swiftly and silently disappeared.

Meanwhile Swivel found the front door locked though the key was there. At that instant a low voice whispered from behind the inner vestibule door:

"Go back up-stairs. Report no one here. Obey, or it will be the worse for you."

Like an automaton the butler returned. Amid the dim flare of the candle his eye had caught the dull gleam of steel. Evidently Tom and his revolver were in waiting there.

"You say there is nobody?" exclaimed Leland, greatly mystified. "Well, maybe the rats were gnawing about the wire. Let us have our drink and get down to business again."

Franconi tossed off his glass lightly, though the other two could hardly swallow theirs.

"Now, gentlemen," remarked the artist, "we understand each other. On the night of the commodore's death, I happen to be detained later than usual by Mees Sutherland to retouch a portrait in her boudoir. Meanwhile she goes out. I find that I am hungry. I ring. But no one answers. For why? My friend here, Signor Swivel—he has sent them all out of the house on one pretense or another."

"What is the use of going into details?" interrupted Leland harshly. "We now understand each other."

"It is well to have everythings made plain. Then I come down to see about that lunch and I bear loud voices below. I go forward to the hall—I look into the drawing-room and I see—"

"Curse it!" roared Leland, in so savage a tone that Swivel fell back, though Franconi only smiled sweetly. "Never mind what you thought you saw."

"Very well, sir," returned the Italian, suavely. "I say no more. Signor Leland is a man of his word, and I have made—twenty-five thousand dollar."

Leland bowed. He, too, was growing pale. Why was not the poison doing its accursed work? Instead of writhing upon the floor in his death agony, Franconi, enlivened by the brandy, was the personification of serene urbanity.

"And now will I go," he continued. "I shall look to see Monsieur Swivel in the morning. The Ceety of Paris leaves before noon. If I fail to get off on her, I may not be able to keep myself away from Inspector Byrnes. He is such an inquisitive man that I—that I think I had better go away on the Ceety of Paris."

As he spoke Franconi backed and bowed himself into the corridor, while Leland stared helplessly, as if paralyzed by this unaccountable failure of his diabolical attempt.

"Shall I let him out?" whispered Swivel.

"Curse him—yes!" groaned Leland, utterly confounded. "The devil protects him, I think."

As the butler opened the door below, Franconi laid a hand on his arm.

"Tell Signor Leland to make that twenty-five-thousand check payable to bearer," he whispered. "So-long, my dear Swivel. Twenty-five thousand—it is not too much."

He glided away and the butler returned, feeling dazed, helpless and terrified. For a moment or more the two men gazed at each other in silence. Then Leland bolted another glass, rose and began to put on his light overcoat.

"I cannot explain its failure to act," he said. "I had that stuff from a sure hand. Well, I am out twenty-five thousand dollars. But I will have the fellow followed. In his own native Italian town a stiletto will make sure work."

"You will not remain all night?" asked Swivel.

"No. I feel oppressed here. The house seems as if it were haunted. Do you not feel rather queer?"

"Y-y-es—or rather no. I am all right," faltered the butler, who presented every evidence of being all wrong. "Shall I show you to the door?"

He half intended, as he ushered his master out, to cast discretion to the winds and flee himself, once they were at the front door. But a haunting fear of pursuing pistol-balls restrained him at the last.

"I shall stop at the Hoffman," said Leland. "Come around at half-past nine in the morning and be ready to see that confounded Italian off."

Then Leland passed slowly away down the street, wrestling with foreboding thoughts. When Swivel closed the door, he saw Boland watching his movements.

"Now see here," said Tom. "My partner is going to remain with you to-night. You must make him comfortable. You needn't try to poison him, because, when we are about, poison doesn't take any effect."

"I—begin to—understand," replied Swivel, slowly.

"Well, then, don't let your understanding run away with your judgment, or prudence. You can go up now. You'll find my pal waiting. I will let myself out. Now—as a pointer—I'll wind up with this: your only chance is to stick to us. If you don't, you're gone, sure as preaching. Ta-ta. See you at the Hoffman in the morning."

Then Boland disappeared down the deserted street.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE HOFFMAN. BOLAND TAKES THE TRAIL.

At half-past nine the next morning, Mr. Swivel entered the Hoffman House and asked the clerk to be shown to the room of De Lancy Leland. The butler was in ordinary street costume. He looked haggard and anxious. Following him was Smalley, who had never allowed the man out of his sight for an instant. At the same time young Boland rose from a chair in the corridor as Swivel disappeared up-stairs in the wake of a call-boy.

"I guess there is no need of my following him up there," said Smalley, as the two drew together.

"After all that we saw and heard last night, Swivel knows his only chance outside of utter flight and disappearance is to stand in with us. Well, he has got no money to leave on, nor will Leland give him any, for he needs him here."

"I suppose as soon as we bag the Italian we might as well have Leland nabbed at once!"

"You are good at executing, George, but when it comes to cool planning, you are not in it. If Leland is arrested now, how does that help us to find Miss Sutherland? True, the police might hunt her up, but I have promised that amusement for you and I. We might as well get all the credit for ourselves that we can out of this case and let the police hoe their own row. We also want this precious traitor to entrap himself so deeply that when we bring him up finally the whole world will stare, both at our shrewdness and his villainy. Have patience. He is roping himself the tighter every day. Ah! here they both come—a delightful pair of rascals. Let us get into a corner."

Leland and Swivel descended the main staircase and walked into the reading-room. Smalley, who was unknown to De Lancy, sauntered in after them. The dead commodore's nephew sat down at a writing-table, drew forth a check-book and wrote. Smalley, seated near, seemed to be absorbed in smoking. Swivel glared malevolently, like a trapped animal.

"There," said Leland, handing his butler a draft. "Do not give it to him until you see him safely aboard, and the gangplank ready to fall. I have made it out in another name than my own for precautionary reasons. Tell him I will cable instructions to him at Paris regarding the cashing of it. Curse him! He has euchiored me out of a snug pile, but I will be even with him yet."

"I would," grumbled Swivel. "He is a complete hog. Twenty-five thousand. That is five times what you are to give me."

"Perhaps," returned Leland, with a cunning smile, "but the law has hardly any hold on Franconi at present. It has a good one on you."

Only the public place they were in prevented Swivel from breaking into execrations at this manifestation of his master's complete selfishness.

"I hardly think this is fair," he said. "This Italian, for merely avoiding a chance to give you away—"

"Us—us, my good fellow," corrected Leland, blandly. "Your safety, as an accessory before and after the fact, is compromised quite as surely as mine."

"He gets all this cash for merely going

away," insisted the butler, in a voice thick with anger, "while I, who have stood by and helped you through all, get one-fifth as much. I have a good notion to split on the whole affair."

"No, you will not."

"I would like to know why?"

"First, you care too much for your own precious hide to want to risk spending ten or fifteen years in Sing Sing. Second, if I really thought you would do so ungrateful a thing, I would kill you. You know I would. A man cannot die but once for a crime, whether he takes one or a dozen lives."

Though this conversation had been carried on in very low tones, Swivel's countenance assumed such a look of utter fear and desperation that Leland himself grew alarmed. The butler, between his master on one hand and Boland's sleuth-like relentlessness on the other, was well-nigh at his wits' end.

"Come, come!" whispered Leland. "Enough of this silly talk. Take this draft. Do as I bid you. When Agnes Sutherland becomes my wife, your reward shall be ample. Fail me now—and your chance of life won't be worth a nickel."

He rose, and buttoned his overcoat. Swivel folded the draft.

"What surely have you that Franconi will not return and bleed you again?"

Leland smiled in a sinister way as he drew on his gloves.

"Do you think the success of all my plans depends upon your co-operation?" he asked.

"Hardly. The Italian can be reached even better in Europe than here. Before he gets the money on that draft—if my plans work—he will have no need of it or anything else in this world, unless it is a grave."

Then Leland walked away. Swivel, looking at the draft, saw that it was payable in sixty days only and drawn upon an obscure banking-house in Naples.

"Master is a shrewd one," he thought. "But I fear he has got a shrewder one after him and me both."

Some one tapped him on the shoulder. Then Smalley held out his hand for the draft.

"I am afraid that is too much money for you to be obliged to worry with, my friend," said George urbanely. "You are gray already with responsibility. We must be more considerate of your health."

While speaking he pocketed the folded paper, took Swivel by the arm and propelled him out upon the sidewalk.

"Now for Franconi," said Smalley. "Take me to him. I'll follow." As Swivel hesitated the other pointed to an officer in blue. "See that cop? Well, I should hate to have to give you up, for I really dote on your society. I do indeed. But—frankly speaking—if we do not find Franconi in about fifteen minutes or so I am very much afraid we will find Inspector Byrnes."

Swivel gave a sort of despairing groan and moved off, Smalley following at a discreet distance.

When Leland left the hotel Boland kept him in sight.

This youth was now in high spirits. Everything seemed to be moving on smoothly. With Smalley to look after Swivel and Franconi, he resolved to look after the arch traitor himself. He felt rather like playing with him, somewhat as a cat plays with a mouse before making a meal of its victim.

Leland took the Elevated and so did Tom. At Canal street on the way down-town Leland got out. So did Boland.

The commodore's nephew then plunged into the maze of streets lying adjacent to the Hudson River, and after making several turnings, passed down some area steps and entered a tall, ancient-looking house by a door in the low basement. Tom, who had, as he thought, kept well out of sight, sauntered by after Leland had disappeared. To his surprise he saw that the basement door was only ajar.

What could Leland be up to here? Might Agnes be anywhere in the neighborhood? Boland, realizing that his man was capable of anything desperate, felt his veins tingle at the idea that those gloomy walls, and closely-shuttered windows were possibly the prison of the girl he had resolved to liberate. He took a sudden resolution, retraced his steps, glided down the area and peered cautiously within the door.

Nothing but gloom and obscurity could he at first discern. Yet—was not that a twinkle of light ahead? He entered and softly closed the door. He had not intended it, but the catch fastened with a sullen click. He attempted to

open the door again, but his efforts were baffled by the intricacy of the lock.

"Here's a go," he thought. "I should have been more cautious. But as long as I am in here, I will see what that light ahead means."

The narrow basement passage in which he found himself was totally dark, except for the faint glimmer, apparently far ahead. He made his way slowly forward, feeling the walls as he went, and keeping his eye on the light. It appeared to be the reflection of a lamp or candle passing through some crack or cranny in the partition.

The silence inside was complete. Tom's breathing sounded to him unnaturally loud. Suddenly his groping foot sunk. The floor seemed to give way and he pitched heavily forward into some invisible abyss. As he fell his body bounced from one projecting substance to another until he lay motionless and groaning upon a damp and mildewed surface, his breath nearly driven from his body and his joints aching with pain.

A harsh, mocking laugh sounded from above. Tom opened his eyes and saw Leland holding a candle and gazing down into the black abyss. The man's face was really diabolical in its savage exultation.

"Ho, ho!" he chuckled. "Now, will you mind your own business and let other people's alone?"

"Where am I?" faltered Tom, in a feeble tone, for he was far gone with pain and exhaustion.

"You are where you will be apt to stay until I see fit to let you out. Do you know when that will be?"

Boland did not respond other than with a groan.

"It will be when you are dead. D'ye hear? I recognized you as I left the Hoffman. I saw that you were following me. Well, I do not choose to be shadowed. I have had enough of your impudent meddling. You were a very poor waiter, but you are a worse detective."

Again sounded that mocking laugh that echoed dimly through the deserted rooms overhead.

"You are a tremendous villain!" said Tom, exasperated at last. "Your crimes will be made known yet. Do not think that you will finally triumph."

"This house is mine," continued Leland as if Tom had not spoken. "It is empty. So are the houses on either side. This back region is also comparatively deserted. Your cries cannot be heard. When you are starving and rotting down there, I will be on my wedding-trip."

"Miss Sutherland would die rather than marry you!" exclaimed Tom, lashed into this indiscreet expression by Leland's taunting tone.

"She will go with me willingly, when she learns that her amateur detective has played her false. I will see that she hears only the worst of you and your work."

"She will not believe you. Beware! Your own day of reckoning may be nearer than you think."

"Your mind wanders," sneered the other. "But—I waste time. I shall close and bolt this trap-door. Nice place, is it not, down there? I have had this place fixed for just such an emergency as this. I thought I could lure you here if I ever saw you again after I heard how you had served my servant. Over this trap I shall chain a beast, already half-famished and eager for flesh. Now, miserable fool, farewell!"

A heavy door fell down over the lad's head, and Tom saw the last vestige of light disappear.

"Villain! Murderer!" he cried. "Undo that door."

A taunting laugh was the only reply. Then he heard the sullen clang of the bolts as they were shot into place. A moment later came a clanking sound, intermingled with fierce growls, that seemed to descend from the upper regions of the house to the trap over his head. Tom knew that Leland was chaining some fierce, half-starved animal, perhaps a dog, to the floor.

CHAPTER XI.

BURIED ALIVE. TOM'S TELEGRAM.

THEN the footsteps retreated. A street door banged in the distance, and Boland realized that he was left in this horrible situation alone. He was bruised, aching, yet still unconquered. He knew that he must either rescue himself or in all probability die a slow death of exhaustion and starvation. The beast overhead, though it probably knew Leland, would attack any one else. It also must be overcome or eluded.

At first he was inclined to be discouraged. The contrast between his present position and that of an hour previous was heartrending. Then he was free, and had the man he was running down in a measure at his mercy. But he thought of Agnes and his hoped revived.

"I will not die in this hole!" he said aloud. "That defenseless girl needs me more than ever. Without my aid Smalley will accomplish but little. By heavens! I will be free again."

He felt of his bruises and strove to rise. Though sore indeed, he was thankful to discover that no bones were broken or cords twisted. Then he began to feel his way about. The roar of the city sounded faint and far away, in that subterranean place. It was, he thought, the disused cellar of the old house dug beneath the low basement. He felt in his pockets.

There were three matches there. He struck one on his boot-heel, glanced rapidly about, then looked downward. He reeled and almost fell as the match went out.

Within three feet of where he stood was a yawning black hole paved round on its upper edge with brick. Another step in the darkness and he would have been precipitated into its depths. In his look about, he saw that the cellar was small and that there were no windows or other outlet except the trap-door. There was nothing but the moldy walls, the damp flooring under foot, the steep stairs at his back, down which he had fallen, and the treacherous well in the center.

He was, as it were, buried alive.

He took his bearings and began to follow the circuit of the walls, feeling every foot of space to see if there was any break or obscure outlet that had escaped his notice before. He feared to use his other matches except in a dire emergency. Placing his hat at the foot of the wall, he made the circuit surely but slowly, until his foot struck it on his return after passing the steps. Apparently, he had accomplished nothing more than to ascertain that he was immured as if in some medieval dungeon. There was no avenue of escape but the trap.

He crawled on his knees to the edge of the well, struck another match and peered down into its depths. He could see the reflection of water far below but—nothing else. Just as the match was going out he saw some object at his feet. Picking it up he felt of it carefully. It was an iron bar, much rusted, and had probably been some part of a former pump. It was heavy enough for a weapon and somehow his heart lightened a little. He was not entirely defenseless.

Then he sat down, rubbed his sore places and reflected. The trap-door seemed to be well-nigh impassable, but it appeared to be his only chance of escape. It was worth looking into. Already the close, mephitic air was becoming oppressive. This underground cellar had not, in all probability, been opened before in years.

Tom crawled to the foot of the steps and cautiously ascended until he could feel the trap-door overhead. Then he hesitated. What could he do against those heavy fastenings? An ominous growl sounded from above. The beast, disturbed by Tom's maneuvers, was evincing its famishing condition by a show of its savage temper.

Boland sat there for a long time, thoroughly perplexed. His case seemed to be hopeless. At last, more from curiosity than hope, he set his shoulder against the trap and pushed upward with all his might. He had not expected to accomplish aught more than to test the impregnability of the fastenings. The next instant a joyful palpitation so weakened him that he sat down again trembling.

The trap-door had moved.

The growls were renewed with greater vehemence, but Tom sprung up again and applied his shoulders to the door with all his strength. Something gave way above. Either the iron fastenings had rusted or a portion of the wood-work had rotted. He raised the trap high enough to know that the door itself had ceased to be an obstacle to his escape, then he reseated himself to consider the manner of his next effort.

He was both impatient and anxious. If Leland were lost sight of, the possibility of his accomplishing a forced marriage would be increased. Boland's only present guide to the girl's whereabouts was through what he had overheard in the talk between Leland and this Doctor Studley in the bar-room two weeks previously. Swivel did not seem to know what had been done with the commodore's daughter. Either that or else the butler was prevaricating.

The location of Studley's asylum was also unknown to the young detective, except that it

was somewhere on Long Island. He had been shadowing Leland as his best course, meanwhile instituting inquiries through Smalley as to the doctor's location. The sooner he was out of this hole the sooner would he be able to resume his operations.

Taking out his silk handkerchief he set fire to it with his remaining match. Then, with the iron bar in his other hand, he threw open the trap with his back and flung down the blazing kerchief on the upper floor. The red light flashed upon a pair of savagely-shining eyes and a low, bulky, crouching form. A loud snarl was heard as the lad sprung into the hall, and with rapid clankings of its chain, a large bulldog leaped at Tom's throat.

He struck one swift blow and grasped the brute's throat as the light went out. Boland dropped the bar. It was useless in the dark, and all his strength was now needed as he clung with both hands to the dog's throat. He felt its hot breath steaming in his face, and his ears were filled by its thick growls and chokings.

The beast was unusually strong and crazed by hunger as well. Over the floor both man and dog rolled in a desperate struggle. Tom felt that his grip was growing weaker as the dog's struggles grew more frantic.

"Am I to be murdered by this brute?" he thought as he panted more and more.

He gave a vigorous push in order to enlarge his grasp, when the dog's body sunk down suddenly. Boland drew back instinctively. Then the animal's clanking chain tightened with rigid vibrations. The dog had fallen through the trap and hung beside the steep stairway. The vibrations lessened gradually then ceased and all was quiet.

The dog in his fall had hung himself. As Tom realized that this danger was surmounted, he sprung to his feet in exultation. He was saved and almost at liberty.

"Next time I go out without my pistol," he thought, "I will deserve just such luck again."

In his hasty toilet that morning when preparing to go to the Hoffman, he had forgotten his revolver and left it in his room. He went down, assured himself that the bulldog was dead, as it hung beside the stairs with its hind feet within six inches of the floor, then regained his hat, and going back up, he rearranged his attire as best he could, then tried the basement door. With but little effort he wrenched loose the lock with the narrow edge of his iron bar, and passed out into the area. The open air and sunlight almost blinded him, yet never did it seem so grateful to his senses.

"I might as well go to the rendezvous and wait for Smalley," he concluded as he hastened along the street. "Meanwhile I will study up some new disguises. We may need them soon."

Gaining Broadway, he walked rapidly for several blocks, thence made his way to where himself and Smalley had taken rooms on the east side. Passing Police Headquarters he ran in and asked a clerk whom he knew very well:

"No news yet, Barney?"

"Faith but there is though. We were looking for you last night. Inspector came near opening this, but he said he would wait a few hours on you, being you was working a racket of your own."

Barney tossed out a sealed telegram which Tom at once opened. Then he looked up and said:

"I know the inspector doesn't think much of my moves. Good reason, Barney. He doesn't know what I am up to; but he soon will—bet your sweet life! When I finally explain and turn over my prisoner, the least I expect is an offer of a choice job on the force."

"I think I see you getting it, me boy," replied Barney, with a good-natured but incredulous laugh.

Out on the street Tom again read over his telegram carefully.

CHAPTER XII.

SMALLEY'S FIASCO. A CHANGE OF PLAN.

THE dispatch ran as follows:

"HUNTINGTON, L. I.,

"Oct. 8, 189—

"THOMAS BOLAND:—

"Police Headquarters,

"Mulberry and Houstons Sts., N. Y.:—

"Have located her. Come on at once.

"Signed,

"STEPHEN BOLAND."

Tom thrust the telegram into his pocket and pushed on rapidly toward his rooms.

"The old governor hasn't forgotten his old trade," he said to himself. "Lucky I thought to write to him. He is more than apt to know every old rookery within fifty miles of New York that has ever been under police surveillance. I hope he is not on a wrong scent; but no. An old hand like he is, with the clues and description I gave him, would hardly go wrong."

Arrived at the house where he lodged, Boland let himself in with his latch-key, hastened up three flights of stairs, opened his door and found George Smalley seated on the bedside in their modest apartment, looking quite dejected.

"Hello, George!" cried Tom, drawing forth his dispatch. "I thought you might be here, though I have been unavoidably detained. Now if you have got that Italian safe and haven't lost track of Swivel, we can fly to the rescue of beauty in distress at once."

Smalley read the telegram in a listless way, but did not seem to be greatly inspirited thereby.

"What's the matter, old man?" cried Tom. "I have had a deuce of a time myself. Anything gone wrong?"

"I should say so. I failed to hold up the Italian."

"What?" exclaimed Boland. "Tell me everything."

"Instead of that, he, or rather that infernal butler and his master, nearly held me up."

"Do you mean Leland?"

"The very identical cove."

"Impossible! It has not been long since he locked me up in a miserable cellar."

For the first time Smalley looked interested.

"Explain yourself," said he. "Then I will tell my story."

Tom related his misadventure. George gave a long whistle.

"Listen to me," he began at last. "When Swivel and I left the Hoffman, I made him pilot me to where Franconi was waiting and there introduce me as a trusted friend. I knew the trust part was too thin for credence, for I saw it in the eyes of both the rascals to knife me if they dared. But, as we had the dead wood on the game, I cared little for that. We took a cab, drove to the pier where the City of Paris lay, and there is where I made a mistake. I already had the check and I should have had the Italian arrested at first. But I wanted to see what other move I might learn."

"There is where you were wrong. You had all you wanted out of the Italian except his precious person, which would be safe only in a police cell."

"I know, but I thought I would let him get his ticket, then have the pier police arrest him on board. I thought taking him in the act of leaving, with check and ticket in possession, would strengthen the case against Leland. Proof of bribing the bloke to leave, don't you see?"

"That was hardly necessary. But—go on."

"Well, when we reached the steamer another cab drove down on the pier just ahead of us, and out jumped Leland."

"Leland!" gasped Boland. "How long ago was that?"

"Might have been an hour or so."

Tom made a calculation. Then he said:

"As soon as Leland left me he must have taken the cab and driven right to the pier. He probably suspected, from my following him, that his pals would also be shadowed, and Franconi's departure perhaps prevented."

"That is about the size of it, and the way he blocked my little plan was a caution. You would never guess his method."

"Oh, bother guessing! Go on with the story."

"When he saw me he probably remembered my watching him in the Hoffman House reading-room, for he drew Swivel on one side, and I suppose the fellow told him who I was, and that I had the check."

"I think I understand what his method was," said Tom, eagerly. "But, go on, George. Let's have it all."

"Presently he came up to me, looking as black as a thunder-cloud. 'My servant,' he says, 'tells me that you have deprived him of a draft of mine, which I gave him for another party. If you do not instantly give it up I will have you arrested for robbery.'

"He was bluffing you, my boy."

"Wait and you will see. His impudence nearly took my breath away, but appearances were against me just then. I certainly had the check, and there were his two pals, ready to swear anything, I suppose. I naturally hesi-

tated. He grew bolder. 'Come,' said he. 'Hand it over; we are in a hurry.' I knew, of course, that a few hours of investigation would place matters square before the police, but if I were arrested the rascals would have time to get away—in fact, anything might happen. Said I to him at last, 'You are an unblushing fraud. I came here to stop this man from leaving the city, and he has got to stay.'

"Why did you not forestall him by calling for the police at once yourself, and hold them up with your pistol, in case they attempted to run. You know we have detective permits. This might have hastened our denouement, but that would have been better than giving him a chance to best you in public with an argument. We had them dead to rights anyhow."

"He did not argue worth a cent. He coolly beckoned to the pier police. Two of them came on the jump. Think of the gall of the man. 'Arrest this fellow, officer,' said he. 'He has robbed one of these servants of a draft of mine. Both of them will swear to the charge. Here is my card.' Well, Tom, you know Leland is well-known in this city. When the cop read the name he bowed low, then turned and collared me."

"Why did you not use your own tongue, man?"

"I did. But appearances were against me. I saw Leland slip a bank-bill into the cop's hand and the cop threatened to club me if I did not dry up. A crowd gathered. Swivel and the Italian slipped away. Presently the patrol drove up, for we were near an alarm which the other cop had run up at once. You should have seen Leland's airs. The crowd sided with him and looked on me as a desperate crook. The patrol drove away, with me in it, Leland got into his cab and went—to join his pals, I guess."

"Smalley," said Boland, "if any one else had told me of your being so easily done up, I would not have believed his yarn."

"Come, now, Boland," returned George roused from dejection into self-defense, "what could I do? They wouldn't believe me, even at the station. Then they found the draft in my pocket. It was payable to bearer, too. That looked bad. But see here. If you are so immensely sharp, how was it that you, who were shadowing Leland, let him get away? Not only did he catch on to your game, but he decoyed you into that hole and locked you up."

"I am wrong to recriminate, George. I own up. But how did you get away from the police?"

"As luck would have it, I met old Briggs just as we hauled up in front of the station-house. I took him one side after I was searched and told him how things were. Had to explain partly, in regard to our work on the Sutherland case, but he is solid and admires your method of vindicating your conduct as a reporter. He knew the captain in charge, and the captain has a great respect for a big newspaper like the *World*. On Briggs's representation he let me go on my own recognition to appear when wanted, in case Leland pressed the charge, which of course he won't do at all."

"Lucky you happened to see Briggs. Glad, too; for the old fellow thinks there may yet be something in me after all. Where is that draft?"

"The captain allowed me to leave it with Briggs for safe-keeping, on my assuring him that there were other matters in which it might be wanted as evidence. He would not let me take it away. But, you see, he has a great respect for an editor of a big daily. Now, what shall we do next? Our three birds have flown, and deuce only knows where the girl is!"

"Have you forgotten this telegram?"

Smalley read it over again, then inquired:

"Who is the 'her' referred to, and who is Stephen Boland?"

"The 'her' is Agnes Sutherland, of course. Stephen Boland is my respected father who, in his younger days, was a Brooklyn detective. He has a place near Huntington. I wrote to him at a venture about Doctor Studley and his retreat and also of Leland's plots and plans. I thought that if Studley had ever been crooked, his place might be known by the governor. It seems I did just the right thing in writing."

"Well, are we to hunt up Leland and his pals again?"

"We will not lose sight of Leland very long if we keep an eye on the young lady. I think we had better take the first train to Huntington."

"But we may possibly let the arch criminal slip through our fingers in looking up the girl."

Tom regarded his friend with a slightly contemptuous smile.

"You might make a good private on the city force, George, but you will never make an emergency detective."

"Well, I'm not ambitious in that line—very. But why?"

CHAPTER XIII.

OFF FOR THE COUNTRY. TOM'S HOME.

GEORGE looked piqued and Tom serene, yet both were thoroughly good-natured.

"I will tell you why," explained the young reporter. "You can follow a plain trail well enough, but when difficulties occur you don't use your head. Of course we must not lose sight of Leland. But, it is plain as daylight to me that Leland will not lose sight of Miss Agnes. She is the corner-stone of his air-castle, so to speak. Without her he cannot handle the commodore's millions. Therefore, where she is, he will be, sooner or later."

"Yet, knowing as he must, that, with the knowledge we now have of him, his game is about up, will he not collect all the boodle he can lay his hands on and skip out, together with his precious pals?"

"Let us reason a little: Would he be apt to leave behind the principal object of all his scheming? He is an audacious as well as shrewd villain. Now that he supposes he has bested us both, he will hardly relinquish the main fruits of his crime and plotting without a further effort to gain absolute control of Miss Sutherland by making her his wife. Then the Sutherland fortune will be virtually his, to fight justice with, if need be. Besides, he does not know, either that you and I are free, or that we have a good clue as to Miss Sutherland's present whereabouts."

"I believe you are right, Tom. We must hurry, ourselves, then, I suppose."

"To be sure! Leland knows that time is precious—that what he does he must do quickly."

"Suppose we find that the girl is gone?"

"My governor has her under his eye. If she leaves, and he is unable to detain her, he will let us know something as to what has become of her. Trust the old gent. He is a corker detective, my boy. Now, while you pack a sachet I will run out and wire him that we will be down on the next train."

This plan was carried out. Smalley, acting under Tom's advice, threw a couple of disguises into a hand-bag; then the two hastened to the Brooklyn dépôt by way of the Bridge. Boland, on counting his money, found that he had barely enough for car-fare for both and a few nickels over.

"I will borrow from the governor," said he. "If we give old Briggs a good scoop on the whole affair, we will have money enough."

But Smalley dived into his pocket and produced a small wad of bank-bills. Then he explained:

"When I swore old Briggs to secrecy, on this job, I borrowed this of him to clinch the bargain. Guess he thinks we have got a sure thing or he would not have been so liberal."

"I suppose you promised him that the paper should have the inside track when we are ready to bring in our returns. Well, the money is handy now, yet it cuts us out of the chance to sell our news to the highest bidder."

"Briggs said he would pay as high as any one. He only wants the first whack."

"Well, he shall have it, good, bad or indifferent. But, baste is our watch-word now. The police are suspicious something is up which their wise heads have not fathomed. Your arrest and release will strengthen that opinion. They will try to push an oar in if only to gain the credit of results due perhaps to our work alone. Then again—"

Tom stopped suddenly, and leaned closer to his companion. They were then on the train.

"See that fellow facing us in yonder seat at the end of the car?" he whispered. "Don't seem to notice him. I believe he is watching us. Keep your eye out and don't let him get away unseen."

A long-faced man, with a heavy chin beard and a ministerial air, had placed himself in a seat that faced most of the other seats. His gaze was mostly bent out at the window; but occasionally he looked toward the two young men, who, as yet, wore no disguise. Smalley appeared to be struck with the man's appearance, and pondered for some time as to where he could have seen that face before. The master remained unsolved to his mind, however, until the train arrived at the station nearest Huntington, which lay several miles to the left, on Long Island Sound.

In the haste of alighting they did not forget their man, but noticed that he, too, left the train. One of his legs was shorter than the other, which gave Smalley's memory a hint.

"I know that fellow, now," said he to Tom, as the object of their scrutiny entered the waiting-room. "You remember the Reynolds bigamy case? No—it was before your time. That man was one of the defendant's witnesses, and proved to be a mighty crooked one. I was then reporting for the *Sun*. The district attorney roasted him well. It seems he had performed the second marriage ceremony after getting an inkling that there might be another wife on hand already. But, he got out of the mess somehow. Wonder what the old rook is up to, now?"

The two, meanwhile, had taken seats in one of the waiting hacks and the man was lost sight of, and thus, for the time, was ignored. They had a pleasant ride through a gently undulating country, semi-wooded, for an hour, when they were set down at the gate of a neat cottage residence about a mile out of Huntington.

After paying their fare, Tom ushered his friend through a trim dooryard into an open square hall, where a comely elderly lady was advancing to meet them, while in the near-by sitting-room a nice-looking girl of seventeen or eighteen was placing some music in a rack beside an open upright piano.

"How d'ye do, mother?" saluted Tom, kissing the elderly lady affectionately. "This is my friend and present pard, George Smalley, whom you must make welcome for my sake, and you will soon learn to like him for his own. Ah, sister Helen!"

He now also kissed the young lady, a proceeding Smalley would like to have duplicated, on his own account, but contented himself with his best bow, for obvious reasons.

"Where's father?" asked Tom when they were seated in the pleasant sitting-room. "I wired him that we would be here on the next train."

"We are looking for him," informed Mrs. Boland. "He—" she hesitated, glancing at George, who was furtively regarding Helen.

"George is all O. K., mother. Did I not say that we were pards in this affair?"

"Your father went away yesterday evening. We thought he was only going to town and back, but he sent word for us not to look for him until we saw him again."

"He is on track of something," decided the son, confidently. "I did not get his telegram until to-day, owing to my being kept away from headquarters longer than I expected."

"Have you had dinner, or rather, perhaps, I should say luncheon?"

"No; we did not take time to eat. We are hungry as bears—at least I am."

On learning this the ladies withdrew to prepare a hasty meal, while Smalley followed Helen with his eyes as long as she was in sight.

"We must wait here until father returns or sends some word," announced Boland. "He is probably interesting himself in our behalf, now."

"Well, I don't mind that," returned George, with his thoughts still on Miss Boland, then adding mentally to himself: "Gad! I will bet Agnes Sutherland cannot hold a candle to this one!"

Presently he inquired of Tom:

"Who is that coming across the field with a shovel over his shoulder?"

"Looks like some laborer," remarked Tom, going to a window. "Coming here for work, I guess."

Then he resumed his seat and began to talk about something else. Presently the door opening upon a back piazza was darkened, and they saw a workingman standing there, leaning upon his shovel.

"Can ayther av you two gin'lemen," he asked in a husky voice and a brogue, "tell me where a poor man can get a bit av a job?"

"Not no!" replied Tom, half-impatiently, for he disliked the nature of the interruption.

"Faith, then, O'll wait for the leddy," said the man coolly, taking a seat with his back to the light.

Tom stared at the man's impudence and even Smalley looked humorously puzzled.

"See here," said Boland rising, "we don't want you in here, and the lady won't want you either. Now—will you go out?"

"Not if I know mesilf!" returned the fellow taking out a pipe and preparing to smoke.

Such extreme effrontery almost paralyzed Tom; then he was suddenly struck by a shrewd suspicion. Changing his manner to one of insistent courtesy, he produced a cigarette and a match. Thrusting the first into the man's re-

luctant mouth he scratched the match and held it to the weed.

"If you must smoke try that, sir," said he. "No dodging now!"

But the man, after a few efforts to avoid the courtesy, finally spat out the cigarette with every appearance of disgust. His brogue disappeared as he indignantly exclaimed:

"Enough of that, you young rascal! Am I to be poisoned in my own house?"

"Well, father," said Tom falling into a chair under the influence of an explosion of laughter, "did you think I was going to stand by and see you give yourself dead away?"

"Could you make a better Irishman out of yourself?" asked Boland, senior, for it was he, rather disgusted with this attack upon his adroit disguise. "You did not know me at first, anyhow."

"Perhaps; but when you attempted the smoking dodge I soon caught on, father."

"I had better have left the pipe alone," returned the ex-detective, who could not endure tobacco in any form. "I guess my make-up was all right."

"It is immense, father. Couldn't be better. But—joking aside—here we are in answer to your telegram. This is George Smalley who is in with me on this job."

Smalley and Mr. Boland shook hands.

"Did you get my wire, father?"

"Would I be here otherwise? But let me get rid of these duds and take a wash. There is no hurry. We can do nothing before night, except wait for help."

"Help!" ejaculated Tom. "What for?"

But Mr. Stephen Boland, without replying, cast his shovel and pipe into the back yard, then hastened up-stairs to make his toilet. Before he returned the young men were summoned to the dining-room to their long-delayed luncheon.

Less than an hour later on, the father drew the son out into a garden at the side of the house in order to talk over matters. Then he made Tom go over his entire connection with the Sutherland case, and soon divined that the charms of Miss Agnes had a good deal to do with exciting the lad's interest therein.

"So they fired you from the office, did they?" remarked Mr. Boland as Tom concluded.

"Yes, but I think they will be glad to take me back after we have run Leland into his hole and exposed his villainy."

"You made an error I think in not arresting the whole outfit the night you and Smalley heard their confessions and saw one of them try to poison another. What better proofs could you desire against them all, than they gave you then?"

"Yes, but I was not ready to have Leland bagged. I did not know where Miss Sutherland was, then."

"Ah, that girl! Fooling with pretty women has spoiled many a good detective. If you had clamped down on the girl then, it would not have been long before you would have heard from the girl. The Charley Ross case has never been repeated."

"Well, I—I was anxious, on her account."

"And lost your judgment thereby, for the time being. What reason have you to think that her freedom, aside from your discovery of Sutherland's murderer, will benefit you?"

CHAPTER XIV.

A DREAM AND AN AWAKENING.

TOM looked confused; then he sighed a little. "None at all, father," he replied. "But, I wanted to see her free at the same I brought Leland to book."

"Yes," returned the old detective meditatively. "But about the only tangible hope you have outside of a money reward and some reputation, is the chance of getting your newspaper job back."

"But, what have you been doing in the meantime?"

"Well, I found the girl. She is in a place from which she must be released to-night, or I fear your interest in the case will droop."

"Right you are, father! Never will I rest until Miss Sutherland is free."

"If her name happens to have been changed to Leland, meanwhile, what then?"

The blood surged into Tom's face, then slowly receded.

"If so, it could only be compassed by foul and coercive measures. But, what is to be done?"

"Well, you and Smalley must lie close for the present. There are spies out. You must not be seen unless in disguise."

"How did you locate Ag—Miss Sutherland? Where is she? How does she look? What did she—"

"Tut! tut! The boy is clean crazy! Well, Tom, to speak plainly, I shall not tell you anything more. You are not in your right mind—an unpardonable condition for an amateur detective to allow himself to get into."

"Father, you would make a saint swear!"

"Better every saint in the calendar should grow profane than to ruffle a pretty trail by indiscreet babbling to a love-sick boy! You just keep quiet, now. Lay low; obey orders, and before this time to-morrow we will see—"

"Yes, see what?" added Tom, as his father paused.

"Well, we will see what we shall see; that's what!" replied the veteran dryly as he left the garden.

"Hang it all! This is tough."

Tom's exclamation—*sotto voce*—evinced his impatience. But, presently, having curbed his feelings to some extent, he went in search of Smalley, and found that young man turning over the music, while Helen Boland played a fetching waltz of the latest pattern with a good deal of snap and expression. Tom gave several audible indications of his weariness at the slow passage of time.

"Take things easy, my boy!" urged Smalley, with a provoking air of being in the seventh heaven of enjoyment himself. "Don't you think we are having a great time? I feel immense, myself!"

Tom regarded the couple in great disdain. Then he thought of Agnes, and became melancholy.

"George is too cursed jolly," he reflected, as he took his way out into an orchard attached to the premises. "He and Helen seem to be making hay rapidly."

Presently he found himself near an abrupt acclivity offering a distant view of the bay, near by, and the Sound beyond. The town of Huntingdon lay between the water and his father's place. During Revolutionary days the British had erected a stone and earth fort there, the ruins of which are still quite prominent. Tom regarded the pleasing view listlessly, until his eyes rested on a long, jail-like looking building far out upon the rugged point of land forming the west side of the little bay.

No other houses were near it except what seemed to belong to the place. A high stone wall fenced in its extensive grounds from the rest of the point to the south. On every side was the salt water. The grim aspect of the spot, and the wild-looking forest that was adjacent, were ominously suggestive of a place of forcible restraint.

"Looks almost like a prison," commented Tom, "but I will bet my life that is Studley's Asylum."

He walked to the ruined old fortress and threw himself down in a turf embrasure, resting his chin on his hands and gazing upon the place where he now believed Agnes to be. The fatigue and lack of sleep he had recently undergone were soon too much for him, and before he realized what was happening he fell asleep.

How long he continued thus was startlingly forced on his mind by the manner of his awakening. He dreamed that his father and Smalley had, somehow, disappeared and that, alone and unaided, he was threading the mazes of Studley's mad-house. Fantastically dressed people followed him, surrounded him and obstructed his way. Hideous faces leered at him; strange voices gibbered in his ears; rough hands held him in order to bear him away. When he finally released himself, and peered into one cell after another, a voice would exclaim:

"Not there! not there! but yonder!"

When he would go yonder other voices would mockingly bid him still go elsewhere.

Then, all at once, he found himself in a dark, dank cavern, and on a bed of boughs he saw Agnes Sutherland lying, bound hand and foot. Presently the boughs were on fire. He could smell the smoke and see and hear the flames and their hissing. Agnes seemed to be burning up! He rushed to the fair one's side and pulled away the blazing fagots. But they would be mysteriously renewed, and Agnes—this was especially horrible to him—was laughing at his frantic exertions, mocking him and pointing to the mad-house.

"Not here, fool!" she shrieked. "Not here; but there!"

Great drops stood upon his brow. He brushed them off and—behold! his hands were red! Upon them was blood! He cried out and ran toward the mad-house, when something fell on him with terrible power. A great weight was

on his chest; strong hands were tugging at his limbs; the flames were drawing near again. A hoarse, inarticulate cry burst from his lips and he awoke!

Twilight was at hand; the air felt moist and cool, though his head was warm and throbbing. He struggled helplessly, but fell back exhausted.

"You might as well take things easy, I guess," said a husky voice that sent a disagreeable thrill to his very bones.

"Where am I? What has happened?" he asked, more to himself than to any one else.

"You are hard and fast; that's what's the matter," replied the same voice. "Franconi, bring him down so that we can talk and be sociable."

Some one half carried and half dragged him around a projecting angle of earth, when the gleam of a lantern assailed his eyes. Several men were seated or lying on the ground. All were armed, but their ragged garb and sinister, vicious faces were the reverse of reassuring to Boland, who had at last collected his scattered wits.

Seated on a rock was Swivel, the butler! It was he who had spoken. The snake-like eye and malevolent smile of the Italian near by made Tom shudder. The other men he did not know.

Tom looked about him with care. The old fort had disappeared. They seemed to be in a wooded ravine having precipitous sides and with a glint of starlight above and a liquid sound of waves not far away.

He remembered his father's injunction to keep close, as spies were out, and silently execrated his own indiscreetness in venturing forth without disguise. Then to negligently fall asleep!

This, then, was the fateful result of that horrible dream. The spies had found him helpless, had captured, dragged and carried him off, and now his friends were doubtless wondering where he was.

The situation was none the less maddening to him on account of the mystery of it. Apparently his foes were also puzzled, for Swivel looked on the lad curiously.

"Glad we found you," said the butler at last, "though I must say I hardly thought I should set eyes on you again, especially down here."

"I demand to be set free!" cried Tom, indignantly. "You shall suffer for this outrage."

"Don't say!" ejaculated Swivel sarcastically. "Sounds like big words out of a weak stomach, don't it, boys?"

Tom struggled with his bonds, for he was tied hand and foot, but his efforts to release himself were vain. Swivel shook his fist at the youth, exclaiming:

"You sing low, now, will you? You may get a biff on the head that will settle you, once for all. You thought you had us dead to rights in town, didn't you? But I'll be skinned if you have got much show here. D'ye think we don't know what you're up to? Hain't you as good as robed this here Italian?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollar!" echoed Franconi, showing his white teeth disagreeably.

"Yes!" shouted Swivel, working himself up into a rage. "And look how you are doin' me and my master! I call that downright mean—I do. Live and let live, I say."

"You scoundrelly, murdering wretch!" retorted Tom, in righteous scorn. "Such scum as you and your master are fit food only for the jail or—the gallows. Loose me, I say!"

He began to shout long and lustily.

"Gag the fool!" roared Swivel. "I thought he was disposed of in New York, but here he turns up again like a bad dollar, just when he isn't wanted."

Franconi and one of the men proceeded to force a gag into Tom's mouth, but the youth resisted, bound as he was, at the same time continuing to shout.

"Smother him, curse it all!" insisted Swivel, his distorted eyes glinting fairly green in his anger. "Throw him into the cave. He will bring some one down on us yet with his infernal yowling!"

CHAPTER XV.

BOUND AND GAGGED. IN THE CAVE.

BUT Boland, drawing up his legs, drove his feet with all his force into the Italian's stomach, who groaned, rolled his eyes and fell down breathless. Quick as a flash, Tom jumped to his feet and struck the second man in the face with the heavy iron handcuffs by which his wrists were bound.

The man also staggered and reeled. Young Boland, apparently beside himself with rage, cast himself upon Swivel and the two fell to the earth together, Tom using the while the heavy bracelets upon the face of the butler until he was dragged back and thrown down by the other men, who seemed to be tramps.

"Kill the cursed hound!" shrieked Swivel, struggling to his feet with blood trickling from his face that was convulsed with fury. "Kill him! Where is a knife—pistol—anything?"

He plucked a gun from the hands of a tramp, while Franconi, grasping a stiletto, watched for an opportunity to sheathe the same in Boland's bosom. Another movement and the young reporter might have met an unwelcome fate then and there.

"Stand back!" said a quick, authoritative voice behind the would-be murderers. "Have you not other work on hand without quarreling among yourselves?"

The men fell back obediently, leaving Tom lying bound, though still unsubdued in spirit. Looking up, the youth saw De Lancy Leland approaching, while behind him was the long-faced, ministerial-appearing man whom the young men had noticed on the train.

When Leland recognized Tom, he fell back a step and his face took on an expression of anxiety and even fear.

"You here?" he exclaimed. "I thought you were out of my way, at last."

"Not much I ain't!" retorted Tom, boldly. "As long as you are outside of a jail and working vile schemes against the weak and innocent, you will find me camped on your trail. Make a note of that, will you?"

"How came he here?" demanded Leland, of the others.

"We found him asleep at the old fort on the hill, by accident," replied Swivel. "Remembering where you said you had left the bloke, we was rather took back. But, knowing that you didn't want him running round loose, we give him a touch of ether, trussed him up and fetched him here. A deuce of a time he has given us since he woke up. Seems like he ain't a bit grateful for what we've done, either."

A coarse laugh went round at this feeble witticism, while Leland reflected.

"Gag him again and throw him in the cave," he ordered, at length. "Knife him if he resists. What? Will you let one boy, and he bound, baffle the lot of you?"

But Tom, being somewhat exhausted, was more easily disposed of than before. His hand whirled yet with the fumes that had been inhaled when they first bound him. Presently he was dragged into a dark, subterranean place where the rocks were damp and he could hear water slowly dripping. Probably it was some one of the small caverns that were not infrequent among the rocky bluffs in that vicinity. Outside he heard the murmur of voices for a time; then the party appeared to go away and all was silent but for the drip in the cave and the sigh of the breeze in the trees without.

"What a situation!" he thought, as the possible contingencies that might follow his continued detention arose in his mind. "To-night, of all nights in the world, for me to be tied here, is maddening. Indeed, I shall go mad if I think much of Agnes in the hands of those devils, and she helpless and unaided."

Presently, however, he began to set his wits to work. Surely he might devise some method of self-liberation. His hands were small and his handcuffs large. He worked for many minutes, trying to force the steel bracelets down over his palms. The edges lacerated his skin and his fingers grew slippery with blood. But he hardly felt any pain. Only an intense purpose, amounting almost to frenzy animated his soul. He felt that if his own heedlessness had brought him into this situation, his own ingenuity ought to extricate him therefrom.

At last, one cuff slipped over the half-raw and bleeding hand! One arm now being free, he tore off the gag and unbound his feet. Then he rose with the handcuffs hanging to his right wrist. He was free at last! Crawling stealthily to the cavern's mouth, he saw a single guard dozing over the embers of a small fire. Tom crept forward, not unlike a panther about to leap.

Raising his right arm, the heavy bracelets of steel came down on the man's head. He rolled over helpless, uttering a low groan. Tom bound him securely, gagged him as he himself had been gagged, and dragged the fellow inside just as he was recovering his senses. Then he returned to the open air and listened long and intently.

CHAPTER XVI.

WAITING FOR TOM. THE DOOR IN THE WALL.

WHEN night fell and Tom Boland could not be found there was great uneasiness at the house of his parents. The elder Boland returned after an absence of an hour or more, and called George Smalley from his agreeable occupation of entertaining Miss Boland by teaching her the mysteries of baccarat.

Smalley followed the ex-detective into the latter's own den. This apartment was filled with odds and ends of farming and fishing implements, and sundry odd-looking suits and disguises. The old officer had not entirely forsaken the tools of his former profession.

"Where is Tom?" was his first query. "I looked for him as I came in."

"Don't know, I am sure. Haven't seen the old boy for two hours. Miss Helen and I—"

"Better leave Miss Helen alone—for to-night at any rate," said her father significantly. "We have graver matters at hand. Tom will be along shortly, I guess, though I must say that I cautioned him about going off. Have you any weapon, Mr. Smalley?"

Smalley had his revolver. Mr. Boland handed him a suit of rustic clothing rather the worse for wear, and also a set of false whiskers and a wig.

"Take these in the next room and put them on," said Mr. Boland. "Here is a heavy walking stick. You may need a club before you are done. When you return I may touch up your face a little to give you a truly bucolic appearance. We hardly know what resistance we may meet with. I have wired for aid, yet it may not arrive in time."

Smalley obeyed these instructions, though thinking more about Miss Helen than of the possible peril that might threaten. He soon presented himself before that astonished young lady so completely changed, even as to complexion, that she was about to leave the room when his already familiar voice reassured her.

"Why, you look perfectly horrid," she frankly told him in a laughing way. "I see the marks now of father's rouge pot. He would never do to improve a lady's complexion, much as he prides himself on his skill in touching up one's features."

"Am I such a fright?" asked George rather ruefully.

"Well, perhaps not in reality, but as a make-up I must confess I shudder to look at you."

But this badinage was cut short by the entrance of Boland senior in his Hibernian costume and with a cloud of untried anxiety upon his brow.

"Where in the world can Tom be?" he demanded of the two young people, impatiently.

Of course no one knew. The young man had not been seen for several hours. Night was at hand. Mr. Boland fumed and fretted during the dinner hour and up to the time when it was necessary to act.

"This comes of youthful forwardness," he grumbled. "Tom doubtless imagines himself to be a better detective than others who were in harness before he was born. I told him to lie low. Now—the mischief only knows where he is! Come, Mr. Smalley. We are sadly crippled, and we ought to throw up his case. But the boy would never get over it now if the thing miscarried. Let us go. We have half a dozen men's work ahead of us, I fear."

Smalley, after a last word with Helen, tore himself away, and the two men plunged into the darkness without, leaving two quite anxious women behind, not only on their account but Tom's. Mr. Boland avoided the town, and made a long detour to the left through field, patches of woodland, over fences and across high-roads. Smalley soon lost his bearings and followed the older man without knowing whither they were going. Mr. Boland seemed disposed to keep his plans to himself. For a long time they maintained a grim silence, except for an occasional ejaculation of Boland's over the dereliction of his son. Several miles must have been thus traversed, when George recognized a sound as of waves lapping a pebbly beach.

"Have we much further to go?" he asked, as they arrived at the brow of a rugged swell of land.

Mr. Boland pointed to a line or two of twinkling lights some distance away, where in every other direction the view was shrouded in deep obscurity.

"There is our objective point," said he. "I don't mind telling you now, that our success is very problematic. Thanks to Tom's strange absence, we are but two. Unless aid comes quickly, which I fear it will not, we may not be strong enough. Should we wait we may be too

late to rescue the girl, if my information of what is contemplated to-night is correct, and I think it is."

"Then there is a chance that we may have to fight our way?"

"Not if we can make dodging answer instead. Draw your weapon only as a last resort. I don't doubt but that this Leland has suborned the whole establishment, and has other help besides. He is not going to take any chances."

"Then you regard our chance as desperate?"

"Listen and decide for yourself. You and Tom wish to set this Sutherland girl free and secure the arrest of Leland and his pals at the final stage of his villainy. Well, his emissaries were down here ahead of you. Studley and his crew, as I said, are 'fixed.' Leland has secured force to resist a possible rescue. Unless he wants to marry her, I must say I am unable to see why he confines her so closely, as he is her legal guardian. Perhaps he fears interference on general principles. The wicked f—, etc., you know."

"I also imagine that he wants to thus fore-stall inconvenient inquiries that might lead up to the question of the commodore's murder. He knows you fellows are after him, and is also never sure when the police will not have their suspicions directed his way. Hence all these extra precautions against the rescue of a helpless girl already legally in his power."

"May I ask what you and I are now about to do?"

"I happen to have a friend inside these walls; one whom I have in time befriended. He is to bring the girl to a certain place. His wife and himself are attendants. But the sudden arrival of Leland's pals makes me uneasy. I knew the cross-eyed man the minute he left the train, from Tom's description. In my Irishman's rig I dogged them about, and saw them join several scalawags as worthless as themselves."

"Did you lose sight of them?"

"Unfortunately, yes. At five o'clock I had an appointment with this friend at Studley's place. He has things fixed with the girl. But while I was gone these rascals slipped off and I lost their trail. They are living low, I am afraid, waiting orders from Leland, who doubtless is on band by now."

"Now if my friend only brings the girl out soon enough for us to get away ahead of them, all may yet go well. If he does not, we may have an up-hill time."

"Why could we not go boldly to Huntingdon, get out some kind of a warrant against kidnapping or abduction, take a posse and beat these fellows at their own game?"

"Simply because it would do no good. Leland has, by hook or crook, been made her guardian. She has been declared legally to be insane. No magistrate would authorize such proceeding in the face of such seeming facts. No; our only chance now is to free the girl, get her out of the w—v, then jump on Leland with other charges. If Tom has accomplished what he says he has, I think Leland will have his hands full then, in looking out for his own safety."

Mr. Boland now led the way into an old field, and from there they entered a piece of woodland that extended to the high wall bounding the grounds of the asylum. Then he turned to the left and, cautioning silence, crept forward until they came to a small door set into the masonry of the wall, which was about ten feet high and covered on top with broken glass set in concrete cement. Boland, after listening a moment, produced a key and unlocked the door.

"You remain here," he whispered to Smalley. "If any one attempts to enter from the outside, do not let them pass unless you are satisfied they are all right. Otherwise hold them off until you hear from me."

"But, suppose I fail to hear from you? Suppose they happen to be too many for one man to handle?"

"Well, you have a good pistol, and I hope you have some nerve. What more do you want?" Boland's accent grew slightly scornful.

"Oh, nothing, nothing. If a regiment appears I will wade in gore before it shall pass. Don't be uneasy about me, sir."

But the old detective had already vanished through the door and his lame attempt at humor was lost on other ears than his own. The place was gloomy enough. Though the stars shone there was no moon, and Smalley found no trouble in making himself invisible to any chance comer. He waited, perhaps, half an hour, when he heard low voices approaching from the inside. Slipping within, he ensconced himself behind a buttress of the doorway, and soon distinguished the dim outline of three figures, one of whom seemed to be a woman.

"Smalley," said a subdued voice, as the three halted near by, and Smalley walked forward.

"This is Miss Sutherland," whispered Boland, indicating the silent, female form. "And this is the good friend I told you about. I hardly know what we could have done without his aid. See anybody?"

"Not a soul," replied Smalley. "What are we to do next?"

"Hark!" whispered the friend alluded to. "What is that?"

Loud voices were suddenly heard in the direction of the asylum. Additional lights began to flash from the windows. A gibbering uproar was rising among the patients. Smalley, standing close behind Miss Sutherland, heard her breath come quickly, and perceived that she was trembling violently.

"Smalley," whispered Boland, "take Miss Sutherland through the door and keep on as fast as you can down the wall until you come to the beach of the Sound. Then turn to the left. Avoid being seen as much as possible. You will presently come to a large rock just above high-water mark. Conceal yourselves near there and wait for me. Should I fail to appear, wait patiently until a boat arrives. Then mention my name to the officer in charge and you will be all right."

"Some one is coming," interrupted the attendant. "I must not be seen here. I may lose my place, anyhow."

"Good friend," said Agnes, speaking for the first time, "you will be well rewarded when I am free. If you lose your place I will provide you with a better one."

"All right, ma'am," said the attendant. "I know you mean well. But a man as wouldn't help you now is just no man at all. Now, Mr. Boland, we must skip."

"Yes; I'm with you." Then to Smalley. "Push on now. Look sharp and don't lose your head. I must keep back pursuit by drawing them in another direction. If all goes well I will join you in a few minutes."

The two men hurried back toward the asylum, where the confusion seemed now to be at its height. Smalley, taking Miss Sutherland's hand, aided her through the door which he closed but left unlocked, arguing that if Boland was hard pushed, he might, on coming out, lock it against his pursuers.

Then the two hurried rapidly in the direction of the beach, keeping close to the wall. Agnes seemed quiet and composed now, and when they reached the open shore, Smalley began to think that the adventure, after all, might prove rather tame. But, hardly had they left the shelter of the wall, than they almost ran into the arms of a scout some little distance ahead of his party, who were just rounding a point of timber.

"Hullo!" said a harsh voice, that made Agnes recoil under a shuddering remembrance. "Who have we got here?"

CHAPTER XVII.

AN INTERRUPTED CEREMONY.

The fugitives were in an instant surrounded. Yet Agnes plucked Smalley by the arm, though the latter saw at once that escape was impossible.

"Let us fly," she urged. "It is Leland, himself!"

"Leland it is," replied that personage. "And how is it that I find you here?"

But the girl said nothing, though clinging the more closely to Smalley, who now began to comprehend, how, upon the very verge of safety, they had fallen into the clutches of scoundrels whom they were seeking to avoid. But Smalley was on his mettle.

"Stand back!" he exclaimed, as Leland attempted to push him aside; but on the latter's insisting, he drew back and coolly knocked the commodore's nephew down. "Get back, I say! This lady is under my—"

He got no further, for a blow from behind with a club felled him like an ox as he was reaching for his pistol. Agnes screamed, but was seized and held firmly, as a husky voice at her ear exclaimed:

"Hush up now, sweetness! You are too pretty for a man to be rough with, but if you don't stop that yellin' we'll soon find a way to make ye mum."

Agnes screamed again. A hand was rudely clasped over her mouth. Two of the party bore her into the woods, despite her struggles. Meanwhile Leland had risen, with one eye bruised and bleeding. He gave the prostrate Smalley a kick.

"Fetch him along!" he ordered. "If the fool makes a fuss, gag and tie him fast. I cannot imagine how the girl got away."

"Perhaps Studley has been won over to the other side?" said a voice with a kind of pulpit twang in it. "More money, you know."

The speaker, as far as could be seen, was lank and long in person and limped a little as he walked.

"He dare not go back on me!" exclaimed Leland in a voice now thick with passion. "Besides, as the girl's money will be in my charge, I hold the purse-strings. Those who seem disposed to interfere, have no backing. But come! To the cave, men! We must hurry!"

They moved on swiftly, two of the party half-carrying, half-supporting Smalley, who was slowly recovering from the stunning effects of the blow. His head was bleeding. He kept quiet, however, and watched for a chance to make an effort to release himself. They had taken his pistol away. In the fight he had also lost his false beard.

"If we had not missed you," grumbled Leland to the lame man, "you might have finished the job before now, and been ready to return to the city. I told you the rendezvous would be the old fort."

"I must have misunderstood. I went to the old hotel in town and waited two hours. Nobody came near me but a half-drunk Irishman who quizzed me considerably and was hard to get rid of at last." (This was probably the elder Boland in his disguise and out after information.) "If I had not met you accidentally, I should have gone back. Risky business this, and I am half sick of it already."

"Well, I guess you are not sick of the pay," and Leland tapped his pocket as he spoke. "There are three one-hundred dollar bills in here for you just as soon as the knot is tied and that young lady is my wife. Pretty good pay for one day's work, Mr. Howland."

The Reverend Cephas Howland grinned, nodded, but held his peace. The party trudged on as rapidly as possible with their prisoners. Agnes at last abandoned her ineffectual struggles, giving utterance only to a gasping sob from time to time, that rendered Smalley almost frantic under a sense of his present powerlessness.

After half a mile or so of travel over rugged bluffs and deep ravines, the party halted at last at a signal from Leland, who consulted with a guide familiar with the region. The latter placed his hand to his mouth and emitted a peculiar sound that might be heard some distance. It was not unlike the cry of some night bird.

"If Scotty is awake he'll answer that," said the guide. "He knows the signal. But—blame me if I see any light! I'll bet the bloke has gone to sleep."

"I should have left you on guard, Swivel," remarked Leland in a low tone to that worthy, who was one of the two guarding Agnes. "That fellow may let Boland get into mischief."

At sound of Boland's name Agnes started and immediately felt comforted somehow. Smalley himself felt puzzled.

"They cannot mean the old man," he thought. "Must be they have run up with Tom somewhere."

No reply was made to the signal nor was any reflection of a fire to be seen.

"Confound the luck!" growled Leland. "But there is no use waiting here. Move on to the cave, men, if we can find it in the dark."

Presently, however, as they moved forward, a faint glow was visible and the embers of the dying fire appeared. Wood was thrown on the coals which were fanned into a blaze. Looking about they could not see the man left in charge of the prisoner. Where was Boland?

"Look inside the cave, boys," said Leland. "Light the lantern. Be lively now."

Entering the cave the searchers heard a groan. Then the lantern's light revealed a sight of Scotty the guard, lying helpless and bound on the floor of the cavern. He was partially covered with blood and still so nearly senseless as to be unable to answer Leland's angry questionings.

"Where is your prisoner, you fool?" shouted the commodore's nephew, for no sign of Boland was to be seen.

But the wounded man only moaned and rolled his eyes.

"Water," he managed to gasp, but no one heard his wish except Agnes.

She, smitten with pity, notwithstanding her own predicament, handed him a tin cup full from a bucket that was setting near that had been brought by the tramps who had eaten supper there earlier in the evening.

The cave and its vicinity was hurriedly searched. No sign of Boland could be discovered. Leland, vaguely alarmed, bade all hands at once assemble in the cavern, except one man who was left as a sentinel outside. The others,

as by a preconcerted understanding, gathered about the Reverend Howland who produced a small Bible from his pocket. Leland, pale but resolved, reached forth his hand to Agnes, but she, glancing fearfully about, darted back as far as she could.

"I cannot—I will not!" she cried. "It is an outrage! Save me! Will not some one save me?"

"I'll try it again!" exclaimed Smalley, breaking loose from those who held him by a violent effort.

He wrenched a stick from the hands of one man and with it felled another, but others fell upon him and he was overborne by weight and numbers, thrown down and bound hand and feet.

"Agnes," said Leland, while the girl struggled with her captors, "I have sworn to make you my wife. Do you think, after going as far as I have, that I am to be now turned aside?"

"You are a monster!" she retorted. "I never liked you, and now I detest you above every living thing."

"Come!" said he, with a bitter smile. "You cannot escape. You and your wealth are both mine by might. This night shall make them both mine by law."

Two miscreants now held her before the preacher, if preacher he really was. Leland seized her right hand in his own. In his left something glittered. It was a wedding ring. Miss Sutherland shrieked, and strove again to resist but her strength was waning.

"Proceed," said Leland to the Reverend Howland, who was looking so much alarmed at all this violence that his employer began to fear the clergyman might even now decline to go on. "Are you going to be all night saying over a dozen words? The lady is growing weak, but she can rest when she is Mrs. De Lancy Leland."

Agnes made a gesture of utter abhorrence, but Leland, with a revolver in his left hand, while grasping his intended bride with his right, again shouted:

"Go on, will you? Make it short."

The Reverend Howland, forgetting his Bible entirely, began the brief, legal form prescribed by law, in a mumbling and confused manner. At the question "Wilt thou have this woman, etc.," Leland responded with a loud affirmative. The eyes of Agnes were already closing, and her own silence was passed over. She was fainting.

"If any one present," continued the reverend rascal, "knows cause why this man and this woman should not be joined together in legal matrimony, let them now speak or forever after hold their peace."

"Hold!" exclaimed a high, stern voice. "I forbid this outrage."

A man was thrusting the scared sentinel aside.

Every one turned except Agnes, whose sinking form gradually collapsed as she dropped to the earth, while her supporters fell back in alarm. Leland, uttering a savage oath, leveled his revolver at the intruder and fired.

"Die!" he shouted. "Die like a dog!"

The smoke and the bellowing echoes filled the cavern, rolling forth upon the night air without. From down the glen followed a distant shout, and one listening without might have heard the rapid tread of many advancing feet.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. BOLAND'S ADVENTURE. THE RELIEF.

WHEN ex-detective Stephen Boland and the asylum attendant ran back to the building, they met a woman at a side entrance. It was the attendant's wife.

"Get to your ward, John," said she to her husband. "If either of us are suspected our places are lost."

"Then they have discovered her absence?" asked Boland eagerly, as the woman appeared greatly agitated.

"They know that she is not in her room and are searching the building. You must not be seen here, Mr. Boland. Come, John."

"Go with your wife," said Boland to his friend. "Don't mind about me. I only came back to see how things looked and to divert pursuit, if possible. Should we get the girl away from Leland you will be well rewarded. Why, man, she is worth a million at least in her own right."

The three separated hurriedly. Boland hastened to the door in the wall, congratulating himself on having succeeded so well.

"Now will I go to them at the rock. Then, if that help comes in, some one else may do some

running—hello! Who the dickens is this? Must be one of the asylum guards!"

He had nearly reached the door when he was suddenly confronted by a burly, shadowy form, that blocked his further advance.

"Who are you?" demanded this unknown in an authoritative tone. "I have a right to know."

Boland, without hesitating, darted past the man and attempted to open the door but could not.

"Hang the luck!" he ejaculated and, forgetting in his vexation his assumption of an Irish role, added: "The fools have locked me inside, I guess, and made off with the key."

"Ha!" exclaimed the other man, seizing Boland by the collar. "You must be cognizant of this escape. What are you doing here?"

Boland recognized the voice as that of Doctor Studley himself. He pretended to submit, both to give further time to the fugitives, and to devise some plan to elude this obstructor.

"Sure!" said he in his best Irish accent. "I was visitin' a fri'nd inside, and they towld me to go home by this way. Belike your Honor has the key wid ye to let me out an ye will, sorr."

"Yes, I have the key, but you must go back with me and prove your statement. A patient has just escaped. I suspected this outlet and slipped down here while my attendants are making a search of the house and grounds. I found the door unlocked and the key on the outside."

"Then of course your Honor locked the dure and has the key wid ye?"

"Yes, yes. Come along. I cannot leave you here."

"All right, your Honor. Ain't I comin' on? Sure, I'm approachin' ye like wather rollin' down-hill."

Boland managed to hang somewhat back until the burly form of the physician passed on ahead, as he continued his discontented mutterings.

"To-night of all nights for such a thing to happen. When Leland dined here he said he would be back with his men about this time. Deuced unlucky! Rather a dangerous business, too. However, as long as I am well paid, I ought not to complain."

Then, half-turning round, he addressed the supposed Irishman in a louder tone:

"Now, then, my good fellow, step up lively!"

He never uttered another word, for something was twisted swiftly around his throat so tightly and dexterously that his tongue protruded and his eyes bulged. He fell helpless to the ground, making only gurgling sounds as he tried to get his breath. Then handcuffs were snapped upon his wrists and he was tightly gagged before he recovered from the severe choking he had received. With his legs tied and his arms thus fastened behind his back he was as helpless as an infant.

"Sorry Ol am sorr, to be so brash wid your Honor," said Boland while rapidly searching his victim's pockets. "But ye might have squalled, and that would have spoile me thrip intoirely. Here is the key, begobs! Ave ye'd 'a' left it in the dure ye might now be a-cussin' at your own sw'ate will all by yourself. So long, old boy. Don't be caught out afer dark by yoursilf ony more. It isn't a bit healthy for war av your dilicat' constitution."

Chuckling at his own humor, the pseudo-Irishman left the irate but helpless physician and made his way to the door in the wall once more. It was high time. Lights were dancing about the grounds and parties of excited attendants were drawing momentarily nearer. Boland let himself out, relocked the door, and threw the key as far away as he could.

"Now for the rock on the beach," he said, and started rapidly down the path taken by Smalley and Miss Sutherland but a short time before.

The waves were rumbling along the shore a little more loudly than usual as he left the woods and the wall, and made his way to the large boulder just above tide-water, where he had told Smalley to await his arrival. The wind was rising somewhat. But he found no one at the rendezvous, though he searched carefully and whistled in a low, guarded manner.

"This is singular," he reflected in some perplexity. "They could hardly get lost coming here. An idiot would know enough for that. I fear something has gone wrong."

Mr. Boland's spirits fell. He grew anxious. The aid he expected had not yet arrived. Tom was missing, and now these other two. Studley's people might be looked for at any moment.

"The devil is in the luck!" he fumed to him-

self. "I don't know either where Leland and his crew are. For that matter I don't know where anybody is now, but myself. Let me think. That rascally preacher. He was asking me about Indian Cave. He must have had some reason. Probably my Irish get-up and lingo put him off his guard. He was waiting for some one I know, and I feel it in my bones that the two of them are up to no good. Confound his lank, sanctimonious face!"

The old ex-detective sat down and continued his cogitations. The waves beat languidly, but with sullen echoes as the wind moaned in the trees, while a dismal old owl hooted derisively. Mr. Boland felt discouraged. Was it possible that he and Tom were about to be defeated?

"That lad would try old Job himself," he grumbled. "Where can he have got to? Well, well. If I hear nothing pretty quick, I will try the cave."

A faint sound of measured oar-beats came over the water, causing Boland to spring up in renewed energy. The sounds drew steadily nearer, and at last something shadowy loomed faintly into view upon the water.

"I believe those beggars are coming at last," he said, going to the water's edge. "High time."

He looked closely at his watch, and made out that it was nearly eleven o'clock. The oar-beats suddenly ceased, and three guarded whistles were heard. Boland answered the signal, when the boat at once turned in to the shore. A moment later the bow bumped the gravel and a dozen stalwart men in uniform turned out. Their leader was warmly greeted by the ex-detective.

"Well, Dan," said he, "this is kind of you indeed. I feared that I might be imposing on your good nature, yet I thought you would not hesitate doing me a favor for the sake of old times. How are things down Flushing and Long Island City way? Gad! When I telephoned you, I hardly expected to see you with the men yourself."

"Well, Steve," said the other, a finely-built, elderly lieutenant of police, "as you say, I thought of the old times when you and I were on the Brooklyn force together, and I said to the boys, 'Rat it! but I'll see Steve through this thing myself.' Now, what's up? Why did you want us to take a boat at the next station back, instead of coming all the way by train? Why, rat it! I was raised round here. I know this point like a book, Steve."

"Good thing then you came. I didn't want folks here to know any blue-coats were about, hence the boat business. I knew you could pilot 'em right to this rock yourself, or find some one that would."

"To be sure. It's the only one on the beach of any size for miles. Now, what is the lay, and what are we to do?"

"It is a case of murder and kidnapping. They seem to have raised help enough to make them think they can hold their own against a constable or two. Did you bring your pistols?"

"Yes, and a dozen pair of darbies besides. Dark lanterns and grub as well. We're fixed for a campaign if need be. Dress up, men. Single file through these woods. Now, Steve, which way? You can explain as we go, if you are in any hurry."

Boland was still perplexed by the disappearance of Smalley and Agnes which, added to Tom's unaccountable behavior, made him uncertain what he had better do next, notwithstanding his reinforcement. While he hesitated, the faint report of a firearm was heard in the direction of the cave.

"Get your weapons ready, men," said Boland. "We will make for the cave at double-quick."

Two men having been left to guard the boat and lantern lighted, the squad pushed through the woods rapidly. Presently several more shots in succession were heard. On they pushed at a run now, while shouting encouragement as they went, in order, as Boland said, to encourage the innocent and terrify the guilty.

"Coming! Coming!" he shouted repeatedly as they dashed along through the darkness regardless of trees, rocks, or other obstacles.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT BAY. A GENERAL ROUND-UP.

AFTER the flash and report of Leland's pistol in Indian Cave, every one stood motionless, dazed as it were with surprise. As the smoke dispersed, the pale, determined features of Tom Boland were seen, his eyes fixed upon Leland's already shrinking figure. In his hand was the revolver which he had taken from the guard he had overcome. The handcuffs he had gotten rid of somehow. Leland's shot had missed.

"Release that lady!" he commanded. "Place your hands upon her again and I will make a hole through two or three of you."

Leland, unnerved by the sight of Boland, recoiled from the side of Agnes, while the terrified preacher cowered in the rear. Tom, with his pistol cocked, his eye taking in each movement of his enemies, smiled sternly:

"I rather guess it is my turn now," said he, quietly. "The first one of you that stirs gets a bullet. Remember that."

Thus saying he coolly strode to where Agnes was recovering from her swoon. Already her courage was returning under the influence of young Boland's presence.

"Miss Sutherland," said he, keeping his eyes on the rest, "if you are strong enough, please rise and leave this accursed place. I will protect you. Do not be afraid."

Desperate as was the odds against him, his tone inspired such confidence that she rose, tremulous yet resolute, and passed out of the cave unhindered. Then Boland, facing the crowd with presented weapon, backed deliberately to the mouth of the cavern.

Suddenly a shriek rose from Agnes outside. Tom unguardedly turned his head for an instant, and the spell that had held the ruffians at bay was broken.

"Jump for him, boys!" yelled Leland, springing forward himself. "Will you let a mere boy stand you off like this?"

Steps outside approached. Agnes screamed again. Tom, divided in purpose between concern for her and the necessity of facing his foes in the cave, lost a few precious seconds. Then one of the tramps struck him on the shoulder heavily with a club. One or two pistols went off and Franconi, maddened by the loss of his draft, leaped upon Tom with a stiletto.

Though staggered by the club stroke Boland shook himself free from the Italian, and, singling out the arch conspirator of all, he sprung at De Lancy Leland. The latter darted behind some of his men, and Swivel, closing with Tom, received a ball in the arm that caused him to howl with pain.

"Down with him, men!" cried Leland, firing once more at Boland. "Kill him! Show no mercy."

It was his last word. Tom, feeling a stinging pain in his hip, realized that he was at last wounded. As he fell, covered by foes, he leveled his weapon at Leland, now advancing in anticipatory triumph. The ball plowed its way through Leland's head just above the eyes. The scoundrel stopped, tottered, and with a gurgling gasp and a vacant fixity of gaze fell prone upon the floor of the cave.

At this stage appeared Doctor Studley and two of his assistants. In the grasp of the latter was Miss Sutherland, apparently once more given over to despair.

"What means all this?" demanded the physician, with a well-veiled ignorance of the disturbance. "How is it that you have a patient of mine?"

"I am not your patient!" interrupted Agnes. "I have been made, through a foul crime, your prisoner, but I deny your authority and abhor your methods!"

"You see, gentlemen, how excitable she is. But—what have we here?" Noticing Leland's body. "Murder, as I live! This must be looked into at once."

"It will be looked into," said Tom, who, though again a prisoner, abated not a jot of his spirit. "Don't you forget that, old man! Cheer up, Miss Sutherland. We will be all right, yet!"

"High time we were all right, I swear," groaned Smalley, speaking for the first time from the corner where he had been dragged, after being bound. He had tried vainly to release himself during the fight and now lay breathless and nearly exhausted. "If I could have got loose, Tom, I would have been with you—sure."

"I know that, my lad. But—listen!"

As Tom spoke the tramping and shouting from down the glen were audible to all within the cave.

"Some one is coming!" said Studley. "I thought I heard noises as we came on." His authoritative manner was disappearing, and a look of doubt and even fear was creeping into his hard face. "Some ruffian assailed him in my own grounds. Perhaps he has confederates. I thought of the cave and came hither."

"Surrender!" called out a commanding voice. "You are surrounded. Throw down your arms and put up your hands."

There was a general groan of dismay from the band of ruffians. Standing at the mouth of the

cavern was the elder Boland, and behind him was a squad of blue-coated officers with the lieutenant at their head! Their batons and pistols were drawn.

The cave had but one outlet and the police had the drop. Weapons were accordingly thrown to the ground and hands went up. Then the lieutenant with two men passed through the crowd, handcuffing each prisoner as they went. Tom, as soon as released, ran to Agnes notwithstanding the pain of his wound, which fortunately was not severe. There was also a bullet hole through his hat where Leland's first bullet had passed. Swivel, seeing the youth free once more, lost his discretion in a burst of distempered rage.

"Blast you!" he cried. "Take that for your intermeddling."

He leveled a swift blow with his pocket knife at Tom's throat. But the stroke was diverted by a blow of a handcuff which one of the officers was trying to snap over his wrist. Tom, hardly noticing the assault, took Miss Sutherland's hand.

"Thanks to you more than any one," she responded, in a low, sweet voice. "But, you seem to be wounded." Noticing blood on his person. "Oh, heavens! Am I to lose my bravest and truest defender?"

"It is nothing—a mere scratch. I could suffer much more than that in your behalf."

"Ha—you runaway," exclaimed Mr. Boland, coming upon his son. "Give an account of yourself! A nice mess you made of things, and yet I suppose you considered yourself a full-fledged detective."

The father's manner was more playful than serious, now that success was assured, and he listened attentively to Tom's explanations.

"Well, all's well that ends well, I suppose," was his only comment. "But, my son, it takes discretion as well as nerve to circumvent rascality, these days."

Agnes was presented to him as she was leaving the cave. Looking at the corpse of Leland she shuddered.

"I owe an inextinguishable debt to both you and your son," she said, to the detective when they stood again outside.

"Oh, that is all right. I saw Tom was greatly interested. I think he intends to make his success here help him back to his old job again if possible. These chaps are a tough lot. There is a fellow who has murder in his eye, if I am any judge."

Mr. Boland pointed to the butler.

"He is as great a villain as was his master," said Tom. "We shall prove by him and the Italian that Leland murdered his uncle, in order to save his own fortune by forcibly marrying the commodore's daughter and thus securing the property. We shall prove also, that his authority as guardian and administrator was fraudulently obtained, and also that the lunacy proceedings through which Miss Sutherland was forcibly incarcerated here were brought about by Leland through the aid of this man here."

Tom pointed to Studley, who had been handcuffed like the rest, despite his vigorous remonstrances.

"Franconi saw the murder committed," continued Tom. "I also have possession of a scarf-pin that Leland wore the night of the commodore's death. I found it, with part of the tie, in the dead man's hand."

"Why did you not turn it over to the police, my son?" asked his father, winking slyly at the lieutenant.

"Well, they were so high and mighty with me that I did not feel much like helping them out. I had resolved to attempt the case myself, and I was not going to weaken my own chance of winning. I rather think that the end has justified the means, eh, father?"

"With a little help from your dad, who, though a little old, is still in the ring. Mr. Smalley, too, has not been idle."

"Of course I feel greatly indebted to you both—to every one here, in fact. I should have been hard put to it if help had not come as it did."

Smalley, now a free man, again suggested that it was high time to move on. Doubtless he was thinking of Miss Helen. The prisoners were attached to a light chain by their handcuffs and marched out two abreast. Studley was greatly enraged at such treatment.

"I will make some of you smart for this," he asserted.

"Easy, Doc," remarked Boland, senior. "I am onto your game and I think you are caught this time. I've suspected you before. But kidnapping an heiress under the guise of lunacy proceedings, and being in partnership with her

father's murderer, ought to land you snugly in Sing Sing for one while."

Studley quailed. He knew he was in for it, if everything were proved. Two policemen were left with Leland's body, and the Huntingdon coroner was notified. Tom and Smalley, escorting Agnes, brought up the rear of this strange procession now on the way toward Huntingdon.

Half the distance had been thus traversed, and the open field around the village reached, when a deep groan from Swivel in the rear rank of the prisoners was heard.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

THE butler sunk to the ground. Then the man at his side darted like lightning past the officer behind, who, after shouting at him to halt, fired. The man kept on.

Tom, Miss Sutherland and Smalley had fallen somewhat behind. At the report the man changed his course so as to bring them within the line of fire, and thus shield himself at their expense.

"I must tackle that fellow or he will get away," said Tom. "Look after Miss Sutherland, George."

He rushed forward to intercept the prisoner, who, brandishing his arm, struck at Tom. Something glittered in the lantern-light as Boland struck the fellow's hand aside. Then the young man, springing forward, bore the fugitive to the earth. The latter fought, bit, scratched and gnashed his teeth. His snake-like eyes glittered ominously. But others now aided, and he was again made prisoner.

It proved to be Franconi, who had managed to secrete his stiletto about his person. As they passed forward they came to Swivel in the death-agony.

"Dog!" hissed the Italian to the dying man. "You and your master lied to me. I shall never get my twenty-five thousand dollar."

Rage and disappointment had evidently so imbibed his mind as to cause him to seek this surprising revenge upon the chief coadjutor of the man whose ill-kept promises had brought him to this pass.

"How did he get loose?" demanded the lieutenant, examining the empty pair of handcuffs hanging to the chain.

Mr. Boland examined the prisoner's hands.

"The fellow's hands are unusually slim; the cuffs are large. He slipped them out as we came along."

"Where is—Miss—Sutherland?" gasped Swivel, who was still alive, though his minutes were numbered.

Agnes came forward with some reluctance.

"Listen," said the butler as she drew near. "The night—of the murder—Mr. Leland asked—Commodore Sutherland—for your hand. He refused. They quarreled. I was up-stairs—I heard. They went down-stairs—still quarreling. The Italian—followed. He saw—the murder. I die. Oh—the pain! Curse them all—curse—every—body!"

The butler's eyes became fixed. His head sunk to one side. The man was dead.

"Twenty-five thousand dollar," muttered Franconi despairingly. "All gone! All gone!"

"Shut up, you brute!" growled an officer, as they hustled him away.

Agnes was overcome by a sickening sensation.

"I cannot bear these horrors any longer," said she. "Let me go away—anywhere."

"We will go to father's," said Tom, reassuringly. "My mother and sister will welcome you gladly."

"I'm with you there," exclaimed Smalley at once. "I think we have earned a rest. Your wound, Tom, needs attention. I am pining—actually pining, for a good fire and a bed to rest my bruised bones on. I say, Boland! You may take up the detective line if you want to, but I shall stick to quill-driving. A reporter's notebook and an unperforated hide are more to my notion than such work as this."

"What do you think?" asked Agnes of Tom.

"Anything for me!" he replied, gaily. "Just so that I am with you, all places and occupations are much alike."

It was a bold speech, but Tom, in his exhilaration, was hardly responsible for what he said just then, yet Miss Sutherland only blushed and looked modestly pleased.

It might be surmised that this story ought to wind up with a veritable love match. Also that

in a year or so the Sutherland millions, together with the personality of the commodore's charming daughter, should be confided, under Hymen's auspices, to the life-long care of Thomas Boland, Junior.

But we will not pursue this branch of the subject. Every reader is apt to be more or less ready at such kind of air castling, and we prefer in this case to gratify each one, by allowing those who have read this story to construct a romantic or realistic conclusion, such as seemeth to them individually best.

It may be said, however, that a few days after the "great scoop in the Sutherland affair" had trickled thoroughly into public comprehension, a gray-eyed, alert-looking young man was interviewed by the managing editor of that functionary's own private office. A corresponding consultation was said to have been held in the Sun office over increasing the salary of a stout, jovial reporter known to the public as George Smalley, and to a few of his especial chums as "Fatty."

"Well, Tom," said Mr. Briggs, the following day, "what is the old man going to allow you?"

"Thirty a week, I think. He's doubled me on the old job. I call that very handsome, Mr. Briggs."

"He knows now something of what you can do, Boland. Before, he took you on trust as it were; and for the time being you didn't seem to pan out well. I hear that the commodore's daughter is quite gone on you, Boland."

"Oh, we are both too young for that sort of thing—yet," remarked Tom, inscrutably. "Besides, I am too poor."

But at the wedding of his sister nearly a year later, some social surprise was created upon the announcement that Miss Agnes Sutherland would be the first bridesmaid. This was, perhaps, increased when it was seen that Smalley's best man was Tom Boland.

Mr. Boland senior's opinion as to his son's qualifications as a detective were not altogether favorable.

"Tom has nerve but he lacks discretion," he told his wife one day. "He wants to rush things too fast. But he did a very creditable job in tracking that traitor, Leland, to his hole."

"Tom is all right," rejoined that young man's mother, serenely. "Did you notice Miss Sutherland's manner when our boy was about? You may be a good judge of criminals, and all that, Mr. Boland, but I know girls and their ways. Tom need not be a reporter or a detective either, in a year or so, unless he wants to be. Wait until they are both old enough."

"Old enough for what?" queried Stephen, with seeming obliviousness.

Mrs. Boland made no verbal reply, but she looked very, very wise.

THE END.

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